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# The General Council's Fourth of August

**T**HE clearer the picture of the British strike becomes and of the General Council's role in this strike, the clearer the conviction that this was the General Council's "Fourth of August." What did the fourth of August in 1914 mean for the majority of the leaders of the Second International?

At the critical and decisive moment, when a class (in this case the working class) needed more than ever correct leadership, when the role of the General Staff of the Labour movement was particularly important—the staff of the Second International went over almost entirely into the camp of the enemy: the camp of the bourgeoisie. **Alliance between the upper strata of the working class and the bourgeoisie against the fundamental mass of the working class**—this was the meaning of August the 4th, 1914.

The unforeseen crisis dispersed all illusions, all empty phraseology, all that was mere tinsel and show, and exposed **that which really is**: the leaders of the Second International showed themselves to be **agents of the bourgeoisie within the working class**.

When the imperialist war broke out, the leaders of the Social-Democratic parties and of the reformist trade unions stepped forward as avowed purveyors of "working class" cannon fodder for the imperialists of both coalitions. It is just at such moments that the leaders should "pay the debt" they owe to the toiling masses. Instead of this they paid it to the imperialists and kings—their real masters.

Have the reformist leaders changed since then? What if another imperialist war were to break out again—how would

they behave then? Would they now do their duty to the workers?

Certainly not!

We have had some experience of their attitude since then, rather important experience: the attitude of the Social-Democratic leaders to the Russian October Revolution, the role of such choir boys of Social-Democracy as Scheidemann, Ebert and Noske during all the decisive days of the German revolution (end of 1918, beginning of 1919), the treacherous role of the Social-Democratic leaders during the occupation of the Ruhr, the attitude of the Social-Democratic leaders to events in China, to the war in Syria and Morocco, etc.

The latest and most important example is the conduct of the British General Council during the great May General Strike of 1926. This was not a foreign war. It was "only" an internal war—class against class. The working class had every chance of winning. The objective situation was most favourable. The army of Labour was spoiling for the fight. But—the Staff! It waited a few days, chose a "fit" moment (for the bourgeoisie) and basely betrayed the workers.

During our civil war the Red Army was frequently victorious in spite of the treachery of individual prominent military experts who occupied the most important commanding posts in the staffs of our armies. I recall the following example. Colonel Lundequist, a very prominent White Guard, was at one time Chief of Staff of the 7th Red Army, which was defending Petersburg (Leningrad). He had communications with the White armies attacking Petersburg and was practically their commander, placing our detachments under their cannon, moving our regiments to places convenient for the White forces.

Nevertheless, Petersburg was not taken by the Whites. This was due to the fact that Lundequist was an isolated case. He was surrounded by honest Commissars devoted to us. He was caught and shot, and the Whites were driven away from Petersburg.

Thomas (and does he stand alone?) played the role of Lundequist. (Thomas comes from the workers' ranks, he is



"elected" by the workers, etc.; Lundequist "came" to the workers and peasants from an alien class. This difference must be recognised, but barring this, one is justified in comparing Thomas' role with that of Lundequist). Thomas "manipulated" the General Council in a manner convenient to the chief director—Baldwin. Unlike Lundequist, his plot succeeded, for in the General Council he was surrounded either by people as corrupt as himself or by "honest" reformists, or by "Left" simpletons and people without any backbone who were only too willing to submit to his "leadership."

If a new imperialist war were to break out to-morrow, (or let us say another British war against the U.S.S.R.) the present "Thomas" General Council would no doubt be at the beck and call of the bourgeoisie and would faithfully and truly serve the capitalists of "their" country. If the General Council betrays "their" working class in such a struggle as the May struggle of 1926, it would with still greater ease betray the workers of the U.S.S.R. and of other countries, it would with still greater ease betray the British workers in the more complicated circumstances of the beginning of a new imperialist war.

The treachery of the General Council in the May days of 1926 can (and must) be compared with the treachery which took place on August 4th, 1914. This treachery is even more base because (1) it is not the first, but the second time, and (2) it happened when no shot had yet been fired, and when there was no chauvinist infurication such as accompanies the outbreak of war against a "foreign" power.

Let us study a little more closely the role of the General Council in the May days of 1926.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Conservative Government aimed first and foremost at challenging the miners to a fight **alone**, isolating them, and vanquishing them completely. The second task of the Conservative Government was to deal as mighty a blow as possible at the general trade union movement, at the revolutionary spirit which was spreading within it. With this object in view, the Baldwin Government wanted to sow discord within the movement which was veering to the Left, it wanted

to split it up, to provoke some, to encourage others (by words only), in fact to demoralise the rising Labour movement.

Both these objects were more or less pursued by the Government and also by the bourgeois leaders of the Labour movement—Thomas, Clynes, MacDonald, Henderson and Co. At the present juncture there can be no doubt whatever that this group of leaders was from the very beginning and to the very end in the hands of the government; that it made common cause with the latter—some of them as corrupt agents of the bourgeoisie and others as a definite political tendency pursuing their own aims.

“The General Council,” wrote the British reformist Brailsford—“**did not want** the General Strike. This is shown by the fact that no preparations whatever were made for it. The Council hoped and even believed up to the last minute that the Government would in the end be inclined for peace. . . . The General Council glided **automatically into the strike.**”—(Retranslated.)

In other words, the masses in their irresistible will to fight, to support the miners, carried with them the resisting “opportunists” and leaders who had no other choice at that moment than to “recognise” the General Strike. “The leaders” truly “glided” into the strike when no other choice was left to them.

“Up to the last minute not one of the leaders really believed in the possibility of the strike. Thomas and his colleagues thought it possible to come to some understanding with the Government”—thus the “Manchester Guardian.” The movement of the masses went over the heads of the leaders.

The fighting spirit of the British toiling masses was under-estimated by the Government as well as by these trade union leaders. They played with fire. Forces were unleashed which they could not keep in bounds.

The General Strike broke out and showed what enormous forces are at the disposal of the British working class. Thomas, MacDonald, Clynes, Henderson and Co.—probably to Baldwin’s delight—placed themselves at the head of the General Strike. **To head in order to behead** is a “method”



which is by no means new.

From the very beginning it was clear that the leaders of the General Council—the Right as well as the Left—constituted the greatest danger to the strike. Therefore, the first words of the Comintern were that **the leaders of the General Council are the main danger.**

The masses gave evidence of marvellous organisation. During the first seven days the strike was developing on an upward grade. The masses formed the Councils of Action which were in fact beginning to develop in the direction of District Soviets of workers' deputies. Under the influence of the masses, the trade unions began to take upon themselves such duties as control over the "free" bourgeois press, establishment of an electrical sub-commission, which took upon itself the distribution of electrical power in many parts of the country, formation of committees controlling food, etc. These were already elements of a certain division of power. They were very promising examples of the revolutionary creativeness of the masses. The workers began to fraternise with the soldiers. The workers began to dislodge members of the bourgeoisie from their motor cars. The workers began to put out of working order the strike-breaking motor buses which had made their appearance in the streets of London. The mood of the toiling masses was such as to justify the hope of the development of events favourable for the proletariat.

But the proletarian army has no Staff; or to be more precise, it had a Staff the kernel of which was permeated with treachery. If it is true that an army cannot be victorious only **because** of the Staff, it is in any case equally true that it is difficult to be victorious **in spite** of the Staff, and in this case victory was only possible in spite of the Staff.

MacDonald "can testify" as a witness that in the course of "all the negotiations and discussions during the sessions of the General Council no one ever raised political questions, **irrespective of this or that member of the Council belonging to what is called the Right or the Left-wing.**"

"I have seen the Government in action. I have seen

the General Council of the Trades Union Congress in action, and, as a spectator in both cases, I tell you that if you are constitutionally minded, if you believe in reason, if you believe in the great work you and I have put our hands to you would stand by the Trades Union Congress methods every time."

"Sir Herbert Samuel offered his services to the Government before the negotiations, but they were refused. The Government of goodwill treated him like an enemy, but the General Council—those horrible, wicked and bloodthirsty men—went to Sir Herbert Samuel and asked for an interpretation of the Report of the Coal Commission. They worked until one and two in the morning and got an interpretation which they considered a good basis for negotiations. They considered that the strike had done what was necessary and called it off." (Purcell says the same as MacDonald.—G.Z.)

The "Left" fully deserve MacDonald's oily praises.

The "Labour" correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian" says:

"From the very beginning the General Council made unsuccessful attempts to persuade the miners to agree to a temporary wage reduction as far as the best paid workers are concerned . . . Also when the strike had started, the General Council did its utmost to put an end as quickly as possible to the conflict. . . It accepted the proposal of the Archbishop and carried on negotiations with Samuel in the most energetic manner. . . The General Council realised that the extension of the strike would have very serious consequences. . . The revolutionary forces would have been let loose in spite of the wishes of the General Council itself, the centre would have been separated from the masses, **and every local strike committee would have become a Soviet.** . . The General Council represented a complete antithesis to a revolutionary committee. It consisted of tired-out trade union officials living in the unhealthy atmosphere of smoky rooms, worn out by sleepless nights and disputes with the miners (!), members of the Cabinet, strike deputations—the General Council consisted of people who

were in a **continuous fear of disorders** (!) . . . The General Council decided to act quickly. Evidently, it wanted **at any cost** to put an end to the situation which had arisen (!).—"Manchester Guardian," May 16th, 1926. Retranslated.)

Brailsford testified :

"Friction between the General Council and the miners led almost to a rupture on Sunday, May 2 . . . From what I heard on that evening I have the impression that we were on the eve of a new rupture and a **new Black Friday**. ("New Leader," May 21, 1926.)

Wheatley testified "The T.U.C. has given Baldwin **more than he asked**." ("Forward," May 22, 1926.)

MacDonald was perfectly justified, from his viewpoint, in writing :

"If the strike had not been firmly controlled, it would have ended in disaster some weeks later." - ("Forward," May 22, 1926.)

Every day brings new supplementary information which helps to depict the monstrous treachery of the General Council.

After the General Strike had been entirely smashed, the leaders of the Second International endeavoured—as was only to be expected—to put the blame on the workers, just as after August 4th, 1914, the leaders of the Second International justified their own base social-patriotic treachery by referring to the alleged "patriotic" feeling of the toiling masses themselves. In this connection a very instructive statement was made by the "Left" leader of the Second International, Otto Bauer, giving "proof," without the least practical foundation, that the general strike in Great Britain failed because of mass strike-breaking on the part of the workers themselves. Otto Bauer goes even so far as to say : "The experience of 1921 was decisive. At that time, too, the miners demanded a general strike. This was at that time declined by the leaders of the railwaymen and transport workers. For this they have been for years denounced as traitors. It is not everyone who will stand such insults



calmly. This time they feared to be again represented as traitors. Therefore, they voted—most certainly against their convictions—for the declaration of the General Strike” (“Weiner Arbeiterzeitung,” May 16, 1926.)

Can there be more base sophism than this? The heroes of “Black Friday,” 1921, were (don’t you see) innocently accused of treachery. Therefore, poor Thomas and Co., in order to escape further calumnious accusations of treachery, voted now “against their convictions” for the General Strike, and the “backward” masses indulged in strike-breaking and dished the General Strike. It is only rather incomprehensible why Thomas and Co., organised the capitulation of the General Council on May 12, 1926. Can it really be that they were guilty of this treachery also in order that they should not be declared traitors?

The only true thing in all this is that the leaders of the General Strike “voted for the declaration of the General Strike against their convictions.” This admission must be registered as a fact which offers the best explanation for the further conduct of these leaders.

Big sections of British workers—don’t you see—had only reached according to Otto Bauer the stage of craft solidarity, they did not understand class solidarity. Thus argues the “Left” theorist of the Second International, Otto Bauer, who evidently fails to see that if actually some sections of British workers are saturated in craft prejudices it is the business of the leaders of the workers to make them realise what their class tasks are. Otto Bauer fails to see that during the General Strike the leaders of the General Council did just the opposite.

Even the reformist Brailsford is compelled to admit “that nine days running the workers gave proof of solidarity never equalled before in the history of the country. It was from first to last a struggle just as during war time. And not a single leader proved big enough to express their will to solidarity. . . . The most remarkable fact of this General Strike was unlimited devotion to the common cause. . . . The pressure of the masses was so great that the difficulty was not how to mobilise the workers who had been called out, but how

to prevent those whom the General Council had not called out from going on strike." (Retranslated.)

Without exception all the reports agree that there was no decline of the strike, that on the contrary the mood of the masses was excellent, that the "reserve forces" of the workers were spoiling for the fight.

Otto Bauer lies.

This is how the "Left" leaders of the Second International interpret facts. From this it is quite possible to imagine in what a sea of lies the traitors of the General Council themselves will indulge in order to confuse the whole affair.

At the decisive moment the masters of the situation in the General Council were Thomas and Co. Like every big crisis, the British general strike dispersed a number of illusions and laid bare the real correlation of the forces. The General Council proved to be a "Thomas" General Council.

On the strength of trustworthy information it may be stated that almost all the members of the General Council placed themselves from the very beginning of the General Strike, voluntarily under the leadership of Thomas. On the strength of equally trustworthy information one can say that even before the beginning of the General Strike such a "Leftwinger" as Purcell viewed the affair from Thomas' viewpoint. When it came to the question of acceptance of aid from the International trade unions (particularly from the trade unions of the U.S.S.R.) the "Leftwinger" Hicks took up as treacherous a position as that of Thomas (Hicks' speech on the "cursed Russian money"). When the General Council declined the international aid of the trade unions the fate of the strike was practically sealed.

All the "Left" members of the General Council, together with Thomas and Co., continually brought pressure to bear on the miners, and demanded their capitulation. All the "Left" members of the General Council, with one doubtful

exception, voted for capitulation and took part in the humiliating pilgrimage to Baldwin in order to present to him on a trencher the head of the General Strike.

Some sold themselves to the bourgeoisie right away, others followed in their footsteps because of reformist short-sightedness and lack of backbone, others again were in a state of panic which grew with the growth of the movement, and others vacillated right up to the last minute. Objectively the so-called "Left" members of the General Council performed an even more treacherous role than Thomas himself, for Thomas with his sorry "record" would not have been endowed by the workers with so much actual power during the General Strike had he not had the backing of all the other members of the General Council.

Marx and Engels could not find words strong enough to brand the bourgeois workers' leaders of the British Labour movement during those decades when they could watch their activity at first hand, when Engels justly said that a "bourgeois Labour Party" was springing up in Great Britain. The epithet "bourgeois riff-raff" was not the strongest term in the dictionary of Marx, Engels and Lenin in referring to these leaders. The conduct of the official leaders of the General Council during the May strike of 1926 recalls to our memory—and justly so—these epithets.

The General Strike had no clear aims and no definite programme. Whilst from the very beginning it assumed a political character—and it could not be otherwise—the General Council persisted in declaring at all street corners that this strike was only an economic strike, that it was not directed against the constitution, etc.—and that a time when the Government was busily engaged organising Fascist strike-breakers. The General Council advised the workers on strike to use their leisure for games, dancing and sport. The General Council, which had at first the unbounded confidence of the masses, and to which they had enthusiastically entrusted the fate of this greatest of movements proved to be so weak as to wobble even before the threat to declare the strike illegal—a threat accompanied by the "promise" to confiscate the private property of the official trade union leaders.

The Magdeburg trial showed recently, clearly enough,



that when the big strike began in Germany in 1918, the Social-Democratic leaders, Ebert, Scheidemann and Noske, deliberately joined the strike committee in order to sabotage the workers' strike. They themselves admitted quite openly in court that whilst members of the strike committee, they were also in touch with the general staff of Hindenburg and the Crown Prince. Something similar has been done now by the Right leaders of the General Council. Just as in 1918 in the Government of "Peoples' Deputies" the Independent Social-Democrats, Haase, Dittman and Co., did practically the same as Ebert and Scheidemann, so Purcell and Pugh took their cue now from Thomas and MacDonald.

The efforts made in the press by Tillett, Hicks and Co., "to save their face" **a few days after the capitulation** are the sorry efforts of bankrupts. The sentimental exhortations of the good-natured Lansbury, who advises us not to accuse the leaders of the General Council of treachery and to "forget" on the whole what has happened, are not worthy of serious consideration. **The toiling masses must be told the whole truth.**

Most of the leaders of the General Council have taken up not only a neutral attitude (a la Pontius Pilate) with respect to the miners' strike still in full swing, but are even acting against the miners.

The leader of the "Left" Hicks, said at a public meeting that it is "disloyal" on the part of the miners to fight for the maintenance of their wages since there are in several other unions categories of workers receiving a lower wage than the miners. What is this but the language of a strike-breaker?

The officials of the N.U.R. Executive Committee also refuses even to reply to the miners' request for aid, declaring that they have nothing to say to the miners—quite a la Baldwin, who also has refused to have anything to say to the miners until they capitulate. Cramp, the railwaymen's

"leader," is speaking now of the General Strike as of a "soap bubble."

At the conference of the National Union of Boot and Shoemakers at Blackpool, Joseph Simon and Smith made downright Fascist speeches against the "Reds." "The Reds are in the habit of agitating for the declaration of a General Strike, and when a strike has been declared they act as strike-breakers and occupy the most profitable posts"—said Smith. Does this differ from the declaration of a Fascist?

The "Leftwinger" Swales, the only General Council member who offered feeble "resistance" to the capitulation, cannot find anything better to do now than to join Hicks (Hicks of "cursed Russian gold" fame), and Ben Tillett, in order to try to put a better complexion on the position of the General Council by representing the majority of that Council as people misled by Baldwin and Samuel. Swales, when asked about the causes of the defeat of the strike, declared: "The main reason of the defeat lies with the miners. Baldwin felt himself in the right not to act upon Samuel's memorandum, because the miners too had refused to accept it and to submit to the General Council. The disorganised conduct of the miners. . .," etc. If Swales is not a deceiver, but "only" one of the deceived, he is certainly much more dangerous than any deceiver.

Frank Varley, a member of the Executive Committee of the Miners' Federation (not to mention Hodges) has come forward with a plan providing for the reduction of wages and for compulsory arbitraiton for the miners.

Ben Turner declares: "It is unjust to denounce only Thomas and Bevin, the decision to call off the General Strike was unanimous. When this decision was adopted there was **neither Right nor Left wing** in the General Council. . . The General Strike was called off because we were assured that Samuel (chairman of the Royal Coal Commission) would be able to fulfil his promises and that the parties concerned would be honest with regard to their promises."

Finally, the "Leftwinger" Purcell, published an inter-

view in the Dutch "Social-Demokraten" in which he says: "The big strike ceased at the moment when it had fulfilled its task, namely, when it had guaranteed negotiations in the coal industry on a basis when the mineowners, who dictated to the workers the conditions with respect to wage reductions, withdrew their demands, It is only in this sphere that the General Strike endeavoured to achieve results." This is a treacherous declaration.

It is now as clear as daylight that the General Council's parade of "Left" phraseology during the last year or two was only due to the veering to the Left of the masses. The masses are getting rid of the old hard-boiled conservative ideology of traditional trade unionism. The masses are demanding first and foremost closer contact with the working class of the U.S.S.R. The fighting spirit of the masses is growing. "Left-wing" leaders adapted themselves to these needs of the masses in order to retain their influence over them. They donned a "Left" disguise. And this should be explained to the mass of the British workers. A large section of "leaders" of the British trade union movement, from the local and regional trade union officials up to the upper stratum of the General Council, constitutes a reactionary caste. It is enough to mention that even such a thing as amalgamation of small trade unions with big, i.e., abandonment of craft unions, amalgamation and re-organisation of the trade unions into industrial unions is, as a rule, opposed by the selfish interests of the trade union bureaucrats who openly sabotage this work. It has come to such a pass that trade union officials have to have their salaries guaranteed 10 years ahead, in order to make them stop their opposition to the amalgamation of several small trade unions into big ones.

With such a state of affairs the British trade union movement will not be able to make real progress until the proletarian vanguard exposes the treacherous role of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois trade union leaders, the culminating point of this role, the treacherous conduct of the General Council during the recent General Strike.

The bankruptcy of the General Council is one more bank-



ruptcy of reformism, involving both its Right and Left wings. Despite a number of differences with respect to circumstances and traditions, it is perfectly justifiable to compare the Right and Left wings of Social-Democracy in general. Bauer and Co. say that the General Council "led into battle" five million workers. But we already know through the testimony of even such reformists as Brailsford and others, that it was not the General Council who led the masses into battle, but that on the contrary, the masses dragged along the General Council in their wake (for a few days). In fact, the General Council "led into battle" the British workers just as much as Scheidemann, Ebert, and Noske "led into battle" the German workers in 1918, when these leaders also entered the strike committee in order to betray the strike.

Communists must, of course, be able to distinguish between Right and Left Reformists. But at the present juncture the state of affairs in Great Britain is such that the maximum harm is done precisely by the so-called Left Wing. Just as in 1914-18, the "Kautskyites" constituted in a certain sense the chief enemy, at present the main obstacles in the way of the further revolutionisation of the British Labour movement are the "Centrists" parading as the Left-wing of the Labour movement.

Struggle against reformist illusions is becoming the central task in Great Britain. The strike has prepared the ground for this struggle. It is not at all out of the question for the Labour Party, even in its present form, to achieve more election successes; these, however, will very soon result in a movement strengthening the Right leadership of the Labour Party. The bye-elections after the strike have proved this. Hodges has already declared that sooner or later it will become evident that the ballot box is a more expedient means than the General Strike. But nevertheless, the strike has dealt a severe blow to British reformism. It will be easier to expose the role of the Thomases than the role of the Left-wing. Hence our task consists in exposing to the toiling masses also the Left-wing reformists who are in fact following the lead of the Thomases.

In the summer of 1920, a British workers' delegation visited Soviet Russia for the first time. At that time Soviet Russia stood in particular need of support from the British trade unions. Nevertheless this is what Lenin said in an

open letter to the British workers dated May 30th, 1920:

"I was not surprised that many members of your delegation (the British Trade Union Delegation) uphold not the viewpoint of the working class, **but the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie**, the exploiting class, as the imperialist war has revealed the existence of an ulcer in all the capitalist countries: namely, the majority of parliamentary and trade union workers' leaders are going over to the side of the bourgeoisie." (Vol. XVII., p. 207.)

"A decomposing corpse" was the name given by Rosa Luxemburg to German Social-Democracy after August 4th, 1914. Lenin entirely agreed with her in this description.

The General Council in its present composition is, since May 12th, 1926 also a decomposing corpse.

This does not mean that it has no longer any strength. The decomposing corpse of the German Social-Democracy has been poisoning the atmosphere for over 10 years, even after August 4th, 1914. But as the leader of the struggling toiling masses, the present General Council is a corpse. British workers can be trusted to get it out of the way, to elect new leaders, to return real leaders of the struggling workers to the General Council.

To avoid any misunderstandings, after August 4th, 1914, Lenin issued the slogan of direct disruption of Social-Democratic parties, of the creation of independent Communist Parties, of the disruption of the Second International, of the creation of the Third International.

Should we at the present juncture issue the slogan of the disruption of the British trade unions, of their desertion? Certainly not! On no account! To do this one would have to forget the difference between Party and trade unions, one would have to forget everything written by Lenin on the necessity of work in the reactionary trade unions.

To increase tenfold the efforts for the capture of the

trade unions from within, and at the same time to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth about the "4th of August" of the General Council is not a contradiction of the other; on the contrary the one rather helps the other.

G. ZINOVIEV.





# Problems of the British Labour Movement

**T**HE present article is a collection of fragments written at different times dating from the end of last year. These fragments were primarily intended to be used as material for a more complete work. The general strike, like all epoch-making events, at once changed perspective and gave prominence to some problems while relegating others to the background. From the point of view of understanding and estimating the general strike and its outcome it would now seem more expedient to print these fragments as they were written, hot on the trail of facts and events, *i.e.*, in chronological order.

DECEMBER 22, 1925.

We have already mentioned that we have at our disposal two letters from a "Left" British Socialist, written at an interval of but a few weeks. The first letter was written prior to the Liverpool Conference of the Labour Party (Sept., 1925) and the second after.

"The most controversial question in the present political world," wrote our author in his first letter, "is undoubtedly the question as to what will happen at the annual Labour Party Conference in Liverpool . . . . The Liverpool Conference in all probability will not only rescind its last year's resolution to exclude Communists, but may even lay the basis for a definite split in the ranks of the Labour Party itself." (All quotations in this article have been translated from the Russian.) As we already know things turned out just the other way about. The Right Wing scored a complete victory, whilst the Left Wingers presented a sorry picture of helplessness and confusion. The exclusion of the Communists was confirmed and reinforced.

In the second letter written after the Conference, our correspondent makes the following admission: "With regard to the Liverpool Conference, at which I was not present, I

can now make only one observation. The Right Wingers maintain the upper hand, whilst the Lefts once more disclosed inadequate unity. The Communists also gained a victory. THE RIGHT WINGERS PLAYED RIGHT INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS . . . . " It is hardly likely that our author himself understands what this means, though the logic of facts is simple: If you want a victory over the MacDonaldites, over organised treachery, over systematic betrayal, then act not in the spirit of the "Lefts" but in the Bolshevik spirit. And in that sense alone do the Right Wingers play into the hands of the Communists.

The working class, in the words of this same critic, "is encumbered by both extreme flanks." Excellently put! What the "Left" calls the right flank, is the official leadership of the Labour Party. The political will of the British proletariat, whether it likes it or not, passes through the Thomas-MacDonald clearing house. The opposite wing, *i.e.*, the Communists are a small persecuted minority in the Labour movement. In what way can the working class "be encumbered" by them? Either it wants to listen to them or it does not, they do not possess any means whereby to secure a hearing for themselves. Thomas and MacDonald have the entire machinery of the capitalist State to back them. MacDonald excludes the Communists, Baldwin throws them into jail. One thing is the corollary of the other. The working class can only shake off MacDonald if it really wants to shake off Baldwin. The working class is becoming more and more burdened by its dependency upon the Conservative Fabian bourgeois politicians. How to get rid of them, what path to choose—this it does not yet know. The Left Wingers reflect the discontent of the British working class. As yet it is ill-defined and the profound and persistent endeavour to break away from Baldwin-MacDonald they express in Left-oppositional phrases entailing no obligations whatsoever. They transform the political helplessness of the awakening masses into a maze of ideas. They constitute an expression of the forward move, but also act as a brake on it.

We have already heard the prophecy that the Liverpool Conference would lay the foundation for a definite split in the ranks of the Labour Party, and we see how cruelly real life ridiculed this prophecy. An imperialist war was needed to compel the Centrists to split away temporarily from the Social Imperialists. No sooner had the pressure of events

weakened, than the Centrists retraced their steps. Centrism is not capable of independent policy. Centrism cannot be the leading party of the working class. The essence of Centrism is that it does not decide to decide—and even when it does, that is only when events definitely force it to do so. But in Great Britain things have not yet got to that stage: that is why there was no split whatever at Liverpool.

What would have happened, however, if such a split had taken place? Here too, our author does not leave us without an explanation: "As a result of such a split, two parties would have ultimately have to be formed out of the former Labour Party: one a Left-Liberal party, and the other a genuine Socialist Party . . . . Even if one allows that development will lead to economic upheavals and revolution, the Socialist Party arising out of this split could assume the leadership of the revolution, and Trotsky does not even take this into account."

In this argument scraps of truth are lost in confusion. It stands to reason that for Centrists like our critic, to split away from the Fabian bourgeoisie would not be without effect on the Labour movement. But to bring about such a split now, sagacity and will would be necessary, which are just the qualities of which there is not a trace in the British "opposition." Even if the Centrists do split, this will be at the last moment when there is no other way out. But a party which is hatched at the "last moment" cannot lead a revolution. This does not mean that Centrists who have split away cannot temporarily "lead" the masses, like the German independents and even the Social Democrats at the end of 1918, like our Mensheviks, and S.R.'s after February, 1917. Such a stage in the development of the British revolution is not out of the question. It will even be inevitable if the ferment of social antagonisms proceeds more rapidly than the formation of the Communist Party. Under pressure of a general strike and a victorious rising, a certain section of the "Left" leaders might even get into power—with something of the same feelings and moods as a calf going to the slaughter. Such a situation, however, is of short duration. The "independents," despite their entire policy, might get into power, but they could not maintain power. Power would either have to go from the Centrists to the Communists or else be returned to the bourgeoisie.

Raised by the revolution to the source of authority,

against their own will, the German independents immediately shared this authority with Ebert and Scheidemann. Ebert immediately entered into negotiations with General Renner to suppress the workers. The independents criticised the Spartakists, the Social Democrats hounded them down, while the officers shot Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Then events took their logical course. The coalition between the Social Democrats and Independents was replaced by a coalition of capitalists and Social Democrats. Then the Social Democrats were no longer needed. Ebert died just in time. The revolution, which started against Hindenburg, ended with the election of Hindenburg as President of the Republic. By that time the Independents had already returned to the banner of Ebert.

In Russia, the Menshevik and S.R. patriots, who opposed the revolution by every possible means in the name of "defence," were brought to power by the revolution. The Bolshevik Party, despite 15 years of unexampled training, organisation and militant work, was at first an insignificant minority. Ready at any moment to act with the Left flank against all attempts at counter-revolution, the Party at the same time pursued a ruthless ideological struggle against the parties which against their will found themselves "heading the revolution." It was only this that made October possible.

A split between the British "Independents" and MacDonald and Thomas five minutes before the bell goes is not out of the question. And with a stormy development of events, the accession of the Centrists to power is also not impossible. There need be no doubt that in this case they will beseech MacDonald and Webb to share the burden with them. Nor need there be any doubt that MacDonald—himself or through Thomas—will at the same time conduct negotiations with Joynson-Hicks. A powerful apparatus for liquidating the proletarian semi-victory will be set in motion. It is very possible that among the Left Wingers a new split will set in. But the development will proceed along a "Russian" and not a "German" path only if these be in existence a mass Communist Party armed with a clear comprehension of the entire trend of events.

DECEMBER 25, 1925.

A foreign Communist who knows England well, and only



recently left there wrote to me a few days ago: "During my sojourn in England I had many talks with certain prominent Left leaders on the theme of the British revolution. The impression I came away with was approximately as follows: They are certain that in the near future they will secure a parliamentary majority and will commence the cautious but decisive realisation of the maximum demands of the working class, such as the nationalisation of the mines and certain other branches of industry and of the banks, etc. 'If the industrial magnates and bankers dare to resist, oh, well they will be immediately arrested and their enterprises nationalised.' To my question: 'What would the Fascist bourgeoisie, in whose hands are the Army and Navy, do in such an event?' I was answered: 'In the event of the armed resistance of the Fascists they will be outlawed and the British people in their overwhelming majority will follow the Labour Party in defence of lawful government.' When I pointed out: 'Once it is inevitable to resort to arms, the working class should be already preparing now for such an event, so that the armed forces of the bourgeoisie will not take them unawares,' they replied: 'Such a preparation would be a premature signal for civil war and would prevent the Labour Party from getting a majority in parliament.' To the question: 'On what side of the barricades will MacDonald, Snowden, Thomas and their friends be?' they replied: 'Most probably on the side of the bourgeoisie.' "

" 'Why then do you work together with them against the Communists to strengthen a party leadership which will betray the working class at the critical moment?' the answer to this was: 'We think that in any case we shall succeed in securing a majority of the working class, and that the splitting away of MacDonald and his Liberal friends absolutely does not threaten the successful end of the world revolution.' "

This little page of personal impressions and thoughts is really priceless. These people were firmly decided in advance to get into power no other way than over the "*pons asinorum*" which had been pointed out to them by an enemy armed to the teeth keeping guard at this bridge. If they, the Left, take power (over the bridge indicated) and if the bourgeoisie rises up against the lawful authority, then the good British people will not tolerate this. And if MacDonald and Thomas, whom the wise Left Wingers carry on their backs, prove by chance to be in conspiracy with the armed bour-

geoisie against the unarmed workers, this should not instil fear into anyone, as the Left Wingers have provided for victory in this case also.

In short, these courageous and wise fellows have firmly decided to beat the bourgeoisie in all possible eventualities, and at the same time maintain the best relations with parliament, the law, the courts and the policemen. It is only a pity that the bourgeoisie does not intend giving the Lefts a prerogative for the legal expropriation of power. The more energetically the Fascist wing is pushed forward, and the more direct the threat of civil war becomes, the bourgeoisie will find adequate means of provocation of a legal *coup d'etat*, etc. For after all the question is not who best interprets laws and traditions, but who is master in the house.

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The heated discussion which was recently carried on in the British Labour press on the question of self-defence is extremely significant. The question itself arose not as a problem of an armed rising for the seizure of power, but as a problem of strikers resisting blacklegs and Fascists.

We have already pointed out elsewhere how trade unionism by the very logic of development—particularly under the conditions of the decline of capitalism—will inevitably break the bounds of democracy. Class encounters cannot be arbitrarily postponed until a parliamentary majority is won. Hard pressed by its own decline, the bourgeoisie brings pressure to bear on the proletariat. The latter defends itself. Hence inevitable strike collisions. The government prepares blackleg organisations in dimensions hitherto unprecedented. The Fascists are linked up with the police. The workers raise the question of self-defence. Here already we have the basis of a civil war.

A worker writes in "Lansbury's Weekly": "Fascism is simply a military organisation and it cannot be pierced by mere arguments. It can only be overcome by a corresponding organisation on our side." The author recommends taking the military organisation of Fascism as an example. Quite right: the proletariat can and should learn military methods from the enemy.

From the same source—the objective sharpening of class

antagonisms—there develops the desire of the workers to win the soldiers on to their side. Agitation in the Army and Navy is the second powerful element of civil war, the development of which is not in direct connection with the conquest of a parliamentary majority. The transfer of a considerable section of the armed forces on to the side of the workers would ensure the conquest of power by the proletariat even without a parliamentary majority.

The greatest possible majority in parliament can be reduced to nought if armed force is in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Whoever does not understand that is not a Socialist, but a blockhead.

The Left Wing wiseacres have scraped together all the prejudices and commonplaces of the past few centuries against the slogan for armament : both the pre-eminence of the moral factor over violence, and the advantages of gradual reforms and the anarcho-pacifist idea of a peaceful strike, which they require not as a means of struggle but as an argument against insurrection, also heroic preparedness—to allow violence in the so-called “extreme eventuality when we are compelled,” *i.e.*, evidently when the enemy, having taken us unawares, pins the unarmed against a wall.

DECEMBER 28, 1925.

The “Left” critic, however, accuses us just because we back the British Communist Party as winner. That does not mean that he completely rejects it himself. No, the position of a Left Winger—without rudder and without sails—consists just in that he does not recognise anything completely and does not deny anything entirely. Here we are compelled once more to quote him.

“Instead of trying to regenerate the masses, they (the Communists) have endeavoured to drive them on with a big stick, and the masses are definitely discontented with this. A striking testimony of the correctness of the principles they defend consists in the fact that despite all their hopelessly wrong tactics, despite their scurrilous attacks against friends and enemies, despite their profound ignorance of those masses whom they declare to lead, they nevertheless have great influence. If the workers adhere to them, they do this

OUT OF DESPAIR, because they do not see any other way out—not because they approve the Party as it is at present, but because they are compelled to accept its conclusions.”

Those words are truly remarkable as the enforced testimony of an opponent in favour of ideas and methods against which he struggles. The inner force of Communism is so great that larger numbers of workers adhere to it, despite the “scurrilous” nature of the Communists. But the workers do so out of despair!—exclaims our critic, who also seems to be rather desperate. It is quite right that the workers are really getting into a state of “despair”—and this will continue to become aggravated more and more as a result of worthless, treacherous, cowardly or aimless leadership. One cannot even conceive that the British workers with their age-long traditions of Liberal politics, parliamentarism, compromise, national self-conceit, etc., could consciously take the path of revolution other than by utterly despairing of the very same policy which formerly gave them something, or which at any rate successfully deceived them. Here the critic has got himself into a quandary. The strength of the Communist Party lies in that fact that despite its numerical weakness, inexperience and errors, the situation compels the working masses to listen to it more and more.

The Australian Premier, Bruce, defending his policy of deporting revolutionary Labour leaders, said on the eve of the last elections: “The Communist Party in Australia has a membership of less than a thousand. But it is able to direct 400,000 workers in the Commonwealth.” The “Times” cites these words with great praise (see leading article of November 12th, 1925). Speaking of Australia, the London “Times,” has of course Great Britain in view. In order to emphasise this, the paper states with crude frankness: “The truth is that the great majority of those Labour leaders in Australia who are moderate in their ideas are equally moderate in their ability. The control of the Party is passing more and more into the hands of the ‘wild men.’” In Russia this is called blaming the cat for stealing the milk. We are quite ready to agree with the “Times” that the capabilities of the official leaders of the British Labour Party (at which the “Times” is hinting) are as moderate as their vision. But as a matter of fact no capabilities have been demanded of them: they have carried out the will and ideas



of the bourgeoisie amongst the working class. They were "skilful" so long as the bourgeoisie was powerful. The reason for the "Times" discovery of the modest capacities of MacDonald is the bad trade and bad bank balance of Great Britain. And as powerful historic forces are working for the ruin of the British balance, one need not doubt that the workers will fall more and more into despair.

JANUARY 5, 1926.

In the American publication "Zukunft," which has pretensions to Marxism and even Communism, it is pointed out that, in criticising the British Centrists, I have lost sight of the "revolution" which has already taken place in the British trade unions.

There is no need to refer here to the fact that the causes and perspectives of the evolution of the trade unions are indicated in the chapter on "The Trade Unions and Bolshevism." There is no need to repeat here the elementary conception that without a swing round of the working class, and consequently of the trade unions, on to a revolutionary path, there cannot even be any talk of the proletariat conquering power. But it would be the greatest ignomy to shirk a struggle against opportunism up above by references to the profound revolutionary processes that are taking place within the working class. This seemingly "deep" approach arises entirely from not understanding the rôle and importance of the Party in a working class movement, particularly in the revolution. Indeed it is always the Centrists who have screened and will continue to screen opportunist sins by profoundly thoughtful references to objective tendencies of development. Is it worth while wasting time and energy on a struggle with hopelessly confused people such as Wheatley, Brailsford, Purcell, Kirkwood, etc., once revolutionary tendencies are already growing up amongst the proletariat, once they are already swinging round towards collaboration with the Soviet Trade Unions, etc.? In reality, this pretended revolutionary objectivity only expresses a desire to elude revolutionary tasks, to transfer them on to the shoulders of a so-called "historic process."

The danger of tendencies of this kind is particularly great, especially in England. Yesterday we had to prove that objective conditions were working there in a revolutionary

direction. To keep repeating this over and over again to-day is like knocking at an open door. The growing preponderance of America; the burden of debts and war expenses; the industrialisation of the colonies, dominions, and in general of the more backward countries, the economic strengthening of the Soviet Union and the growth of its magnetic revolutionary forces; the liberation movement in the oppressed nations—all these factors in a growing process of British capitalism is passing through inevitable market fluctuations to catastrophe. It is clear what advances in the correlation and consciousness of classes this implies. But the objective pre-requisites of the proletarian revolution are being prepared and are maturing much more rapidly than the subjective pre-requisites. That fact must be understood especially TODAY.

The danger is not that the bourgeoisie will once more pacify the proletariat, nor that an epoch of Liberal-Labour policy will open up again before the trade unions: the United States has monopolised for itself the possibility of a privileged position for wide circles of the proletariat. The danger lies in the other direction: THE FORMING OF THE PROLETARIAT VANGUARD MIGHT LAG BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION. Faced with the necessity for decisive action, the proletariat might be unable to find the necessary political leadership. It is a question of the PARTY. This is the question of questions. The most mature revolutionary situation without a revolutionary party of the necessary dimensions, without correct leadership, is just like a knife without a blade. We saw this in the autumn of 1923 in Germany. A Bolshevik Party in Great Britain can only be built up in the process of a permanent and irreconcilable struggle against the Centrism which is taking the place of Liberal-Labour policy.

JANUARY 6, 1926.

The struggle for a united front is of such great significance in England, because it responds to the elementary demands of the working class for a new orientation and grouping of forces. This being the case the struggle for the united front raises the question of leadership, *i.e.*, of programme and tactics, and this means the question of the Party. But the struggle for the united front itself does not solve this problem, it only creates certain conditions for its

solution. The ideological and organisational formation of a real revolutionary (*i.e.*, Communist) Party, on the basis of a mass movement, is only conceivable under conditions of a continuous, systematic, unwavering, untiring and naked denunciation of the muddles, the compromises and indecision of the quasi-Left leaders of all shades. It would be the most profound error to think that the task of the united front struggle consists in securing the victory of Purcell, Lansbury, Wheatley and Kirkwood over Snowden, Webb and MacDonald (and such a tendency is to be observed). Such an aim would contain an inner contradiction. The Left Wing muddlers are not capable of power; and if in the course of events power got into their hands, they would hasten to hand it over to their elder brothers on their Right. They would act in the government in exactly the same way as they do now in the Party.

The history of the German Independents—let us recall it once more—gives very instructive lessons in this respect. In Germany the process took place at a much more rapid rate, in accordance with the directly revolutionary nature of the past few years in German history. But the general tendencies of development are one and the same; we can call MacDonald Ebert, or Wheatley Hilferding. The fact that the commonplace petty bourgeois Hilferding still cites Marx, while Wheatley gives preference to the holy Pope of Rome, arises from the peculiarities of England and Germany in the past, but is but of tenth-rate significance for the present day.

JANUARY 7, 1926.

The Left fraction in the higher trade union organs has the General Council in tow on a number of questions. This is most clearly expressed in respect to the Soviet trade unions and Amsterdam. But it would be erroneous to over-estimate the influence of these Left Wingers over the trade unions as organisations of the class struggle. This is not because the trade union masses are insufficiently radical; on the contrary the masses are immeasurably more Left than the Left Wingers themselves. In the British Labour movement international questions have always been the line of least resistance for the "leaders." Regarding international matters as a means of giving vent to the radical moods of the masses, these esteemed leaders are prepared to a certain extent even to bow to a revolution (in other countries) so that they can

take still more revenge on questions of the internal class struggle. The Left fraction of the General Council is distinguished by its complete IDEOLOGICAL shapelessness and therefore is incapable of ORGANISATIONALLY reinforcing the leadership of the trade union movement.

The impotence of the Left Wingers inside the Labour Party is explained in the same manner. The Labour Party after all is based on these very same trade unions. It would seem that the Left fraction "leading" the General Council would also have laid its hands on the Labour Party. But in reality we see something quite different. The Party continues to be led by extreme Right Wingers. This is explained by the fact that the Party cannot be restricted to various Left sallies, but is bound to have a finished system of politics. The Left Wingers have no such system, their very nature prevents this. The Right Wingers have a system: they have behind them tradition, experience, routine and most important of all, bourgeois society as a whole is thinking for them and thrusts ready-made decisions under their noses. MacDonald only has to translate Baldwin's or Lloyd George's suggestions into the Fabian language. The Right Wingers are victorious despite the fact that the Lefts are more numerous. The weakness of the Left Wingers comes from their lack of cohesion and this arises from their ideological amorphism. In order to rally their ranks the Left Wingers will first of all have to collect their thoughts. The best of them are only capable of doing this under the blows of ruthless criticism based on the every-day experience of the masses.

JANUARY 12, 1926.

Not only our "Left" critic in his letter, but also more responsible Left leaders like Purcell, Cook and Bromley as far back as September 27th, foretold that the Labour Congress would be marked by a big move to the Left. Things proved to be just the contrary: only a few weeks after the Scarborough Trades Union Congress, it gave a complete victory to MacDonald. To ignore this fact, to hush it up, to minimise it or explain it away by chance secondary causes would mean playing the fool and go headlong towards defeat.

Fundamentally the Party has the same basis as the higher trade union organs. But the General Council, whose powers



are extremely limited, has not any authority over the separate trade unions, let alone over the whole country. The Labour Party, however, has been in power and once more is preparing to take the reins of government. There lies the crux of the matter.

The Liberal "Manchester Guardian" writing on the Scarborough Conference stated that the influence of Moscow was only to be seen in the Left phraseology, but that in practice the trade unions remain under the leadership of wise and experienced leaders. Of course the Liberal paper needs consolation but nevertheless there is no small degree of truth in its assertion. The more Left the Congress decisions are, the further away they are from immediate practical tasks. Of course the Leftism of the decisions is symptomatic, and marks a *volte face* in the consciousness of the masses. But to think that the leaders of the Scarborough Congress could become leaders of a revolutionary upheaval would be lulling oneself to sleep with illusions. It is enough to recall that there were 3,802,000 votes in favour of the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination even including separation, against only 79,000. What a colossal revolutionary move this would appear to be! Meanwhile, for the creation of factory committees, and even that, only in principle—there were altogether 2,183,000 votes against 1,787,000, in other words the Congress was practically divided in half. On the question of granting increased power to the General Council the Left Wingers suffered complete defeat. Is it surprising then, if, after all these Left resolutions, the General Council proved to be more Right than the old one? It should be thoroughly understood that Leftism of this kind remains Left so long as it has no practical obligations. But as soon as the question of action arises, the Left Wingers respectfully cede the leadership to the Rights.

JANUARY 13, 1926.

A spontaneous radicalisation of the trade unions marking a profound move amongst the masses is quite inadequate in itself to free the working class from the leadership of Thomas and MacDonald. In England national bourgeois ideology is a powerful force not only of public opinion, but also of institutions centuries old. "Radical" trade unionism crashes against this force and will continue to do so, so long as it is lead by Centrists who do not carry out things to their logical conclusion.

While the trade unions are fraternising with the Soviet trade unions which are led by Communists, the British Labour Party based on the same trade unions, hounds the Communists out of its ranks at Liverpool, thereby preparing the destruction of their organisations by the government and Fascists. It would be criminal to forget for a moment that such Left Wingers as Brailsford and even Lansbury in substance approved the decision of the Liverpool Congress, blaming the Communists for everything. It is true that when indignation at the reactionary-police spirit of Liverpool was revealed from below, the "Left" leaders slightly changed their course. But in order to get a proper estimation of them we must take both factors into consideration. Revolutionaries need a good memory. The "Left" gentlemen have not their own policy. In the future also, they will swing to the Right under the pressure of the bourgeois-Fabian reactionaries, and to the Left under pressure of the masses. In difficult moments these most pious Christians are always prepared to play the rôle, if not of Herod, at least of Pontius Pilate, and in the future many difficult moments await the British working class.

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There is a movement in the Independent Labour Party in favour of the fusion of the II and III Internationals. But just ask these same people whether they agree not even to fusion, but even to a fighting agreement with the British Communists, and they will at once jump back in alarm. In everything that concerns the revolution the British Left Wingers are dominated by a "love for distance." They are in favour of the October Revolution, the Soviet system, they are for the Soviet trade unions, and even for a rapprochement with the Comintern, but under the perpetual condition that the British constitution, the parliamentary system, and the system of the Labour Party are not abandoned. The main blow must be directed against this loathsome two-faced policy of the Left Wingers.

We must add that the sympathy of many Left Wingers for the Soviet Union (while they are hostile to their own Communists) contains a large admixture of petty-bourgeois respect for a strong State authority. This must not be forgotten. Of course, a petty bourgeois who turns round towards the Soviet Republic is more progressive than the petty bourgeois who kneels to the United States. It is a step

forward. But this respect is not enough for the estimation of revolutionary perspectives.

MARCH 5. (From a letter.)

. . . . In Great Britain, more than in all the rest of Europe, the consciousness of the working masses, particularly of the leading strata, lags behind the objective economic situation. In this direction the main difficulties and dangers now lie. All shades of leaders of the British Labour movement fear action, because the historic hopelessness of the position of British capitalism directly confronts any important problem of the Labour movement. This particularly concerns the mining industry. The present wages of the miners are maintained by a subsidy from the State which is already burdened with a budget far beyond its capacity. To continue the subsidy means accumulating and intensifying the economic crisis. To refuse the subsidy means provoking a social crisis.

The necessity for the technical and economic reorganisation of the mining industry arises as a profound revolutionary problem and therefore demands the political "reorganisation" of the working class. The destruction of the conservatism of the British mining industry, this very stone of British capitalism, can only be attained by destroying the conservative organisations, traditions and habits in the British Labour movement. Great Britain is entering on an entire historic phase of great upheavals. It is only the conservative British trade unionists who can wait for the "economic" solution of the problem. But it is just because the British trade unionists are directing their efforts towards an "economic" (*i.e.*, peaceful, compromising, conservative) solution of the problem (*i.e.*, are going counter to the historic process) that the revolutionary development of the working class in Great Britain will have greater overhead charges in the forthcoming epoch than in any other country. Both the Right Wingers and the Left Wingers have the greatest fear of commencing the final action. Even when they verbally admit the inevitability of struggle and revolution, they hope their heart of hearts for some kind of miracle which will deliver them from this prospect. At any rate they will themselves put a brake on the movement, will evade, will wait and see, will refer to others and in reality will help Thomas in any really important problem of the BRITISH

Labour movement (they are much more courageous in respect to INTERNATIONAL questions).

Hence we may characterise the general situation as follows: The economic cul-de-sac in which the country finds itself, which is most clearly expressed in the mining industry, impels the working class to seek a way out, *i.e.*, impels them on to the path of a more and more acute struggle. And the first stage of this struggle inevitably reveals the inadequacy of the "customary" methods of struggle. The entire present "superstructure" of the British working class—in all tendencies and groupings without exception—represents an apparatus acting as a brake on the revolution. This augurs for a long period the pressure of a spontaneous or semi-spontaneous movement against the framework of the old organisations on the basis of this pressure.

One of the most important tasks is to aid the Communist Party of Great Britain to understand and to think things out in the light of this perspective. In the trade union apparatus and its Left Wing, it is necessary to select immeasurably more energetically and decisively than hitherto, elements of ACTION, *i.e.*, those elements which are capable of understanding the inevitability of great mass struggles, of not fearing them, and of making the best of them. The United Front tactics should be put forward more and more decisively in the light of this perspective.

As far as the miners' strike is concerned, it is naturally not a question of an isolated strike, however large the strike may be, but a question of the commencement of a whole series of social encounters and upheavals.

The British trade unions (through their bureaucracy, and even the Left Wing) do not fear our "interference" in their internal affairs any less than Chamberlain.

THERE IS AN UNLIMITED SUPPLY OF RESTRAINING ELEMENTS IN THE APPARATUS OF THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS. The entire situation may be summed up by saying that the alarm, discontent and pressure of the British working masses all clashes along the line against the organisational and ideological barriers of the



Conservative trade union apparatus. Under these conditions to be anxious about how we can aid impatient leaders means nothing more than pouring water into the ocean.

Everything goes to show that during the coming period (I have in view one, two or three years) the struggle will break out in England against the will of the old organisations and with complete unpreparedness of the young organisations. Of course, even with the firm revolutionary (*i.e.*, active) establishment of the Communist Party and the best "Left" elements, it should not be supposed that the proletariat would already come into power as a result of the first great wave. But the question is this: Will this Left Wing come through the first revolutionary stage at the head of the working masses, as we did in 1905, or will it let slip the opportunity of the revolutionary situation as the German Party did in 1923. This latter danger is extremely real. It may be diminished only by aiding the Left Wing to find the proper orientation for action (THE REAL Left Wing and not Lansbury or Purcell). And in order to solve this problem (the problem of assistance in obtaining the correct orientation of the revolutionary elements in Great Britain) it must be clearly understood that all the traditions, the organisational customs and the ideas of all former groupings of the Labour movement—in various forms and under various slogans—predispose them either to direct betrayal, or to compromise, or else to a policy of wait and see with reference to compromisers and complaints against traitors.

MAY 6.

*(From the preface to the second German edition of "Where is Britain Going?").*

A year ago the Conservative Ministry was still only on its honeymoon. Baldwin was preaching social peace. As MacDonald had nothing to oppose to Conservatism, he competed with it in hatred for revolution, civil war and the class struggle. The leaders of all three parties proclaimed that British institutions were quite sufficient to ensure peaceful class collaboration. It was quite natural that the revolutionary prediction for the immediate future of British imperialism made in this book, should be described by the entire British Press—from the "Morning Post" to "Lansbury's

Labour Weekly"—as hopeless nonsense and Moscow phantasmagoria.

Now the situation has somewhat changed. England is convulsed by a huge mass strike. The Conservative Government is carrying on a furious offensive policy. Everything is being done from above to provoke civil war. The contradiction between basic social factors and the falsehood of an out-of-date parliamentarism has become more manifest in England than ever before.

The mass strike arose from the contradiction between the present situation of British industry in the world market and the traditional conditions of production and relations between the classes within the country. Formally the question at issue was reduction of the miners' wages, longer hours of work, to throw on to the shoulders of the workers part of the sacrifices which are necessary for a real reorganisation of the coal industry. Formulated in this way, the question is insoluble. It is perfectly true that the coal industry, as indeed the whole of British industry, cannot be reorganised without sacrifices, even serious sacrifices, on the part of the British proletariat. No one but a miserable fool, however, can imagine for a moment that the British proletariat will consent to submit to this sacrifice on the old bases of capitalist property.

Capitalism has been pictured as a regime of permanent progress and of the systematic improvement of the lot of the working masses. To a certain extent this was true for some countries in the course of the 19th century. The religion of capitalist progress was stronger in Great Britain than anywhere else. In fact it was this that formed the basis for the conservative tendencies in the Labour movement itself, especially in the trade unions. In England, the war illusions (1914-1918) were, more than in any other country illusions of capitalist power and of "social" progress. Victory over Germany was to be the final crowning of these hopes. And now bourgeois society says to the miners: "If you want at least to ensure yourselves an existence, such as you had before the war, you will have to accept for an indefinite time a reduction in your standard of living." Instead of the recent prospect of steady social progress, it is now proposed that the

workers should descend one step to-day so as to avoid tumbling down three or more steps all at once to-morrow. This is as good as a declaration of bankruptcy on the part of British capitalism. The general strike is the answer of the proletariat, which will not and cannot admit that the bankruptcy of British capitalism should be the commencement of the bankruptcy of the British nation and of British culture.

This answer however is dictated far more by the logic of the situation than by the logic of consciousness. The British working class had no other alternative. The struggle—no matter what was the mechanism behind the scenes—was forced on them by the mechanical pressure of the whole situation. The world situation of British industry could not offer any material basis for a compromise. The Thomases, MacDonalds, etc., are like windmills which turn their sails when there is a strong wind, but do not yield a single pound of flour since there is no corn. The hopeless emptiness of present day British reformism was revealed with such convincing force that nothing remained for the Reformists to do but to join in the mass strike of the British proletariat. This revealed the strength of the strike—but also its weakness.

The general strike is one of the most acute forms of class war. It is only one step from the armed insurrection. This is why the general strike, more than any other form of the class war, demands a clear, resolute, firm (*i.e.*, a revolutionary) leadership. In the present strike there is no trace of such a leadership of the British proletariat, and it cannot be expected that it will suddenly rise in a perfected form as though conjured up out of the ground. The Trade Union Council started out with the ridiculous declaration that the present general strike was in no way a political struggle, still less an attack on the State, power of the bankers, the manufacturers and the landowners, on the sacred British Parliament. This declaration of war on the part of faithful subjects does not seem at all convincing, however, to a Government which feels that through the effect of the strike the real instruments of power are slipping from its hands. The State power is not an "idea" but a material apparatus. If the apparatus of administration and suppression is paralysed, the power of the State will also be paralysed. In modern society, no one can rule without controlling the railways, shipping, post and telegraph, electric power, coal, etc. The fact that MacDonald and Thomas deny on oath that they have

any political aims, characterises them as individuals, but by no means indicates the nature of the general strike which, if carried on to the end, will confront the revolutionary class with the task of organising a new State power. Those, however, who, in the course of events, have been placed "at the head" of the general strike, are fighting against this with all their force. And herein lies the chief danger: men who did not want the general strike, who deny the political character of the general strike, who fear nothing so much as the consequences of a victorious strike, must inevitably direct all their efforts to keeping the strike within the scope of a semi-political semi-strike, *i.e.*, to deprive it of its power.

We must face matters; THE MAIN efforts of the official leaders of the Labour Party and of a considerable number of the official trade union leaders will not be directed towards paralysing the bourgeois State by means of the strike, but towards paralysing the general strike with the aid of the bourgeois State. The Government, through its most die-hard Conservatives, undoubtedly wants to provoke a civil war on a small scale so as to be in a position to resort to measures of terror, and suppress the movement even before the struggle develops. By robbing the strike of its political programme, by disintegrating the revolutionary will of the proletariat and driving the movement into a blind alley, the Reformists force individual groups of workers on to the path of isolated revolts. In this sense, the Reformists are one with the Fascist elements of the Conservative Party. Herein lies the chief danger of the fight which has begun.

It would be inopportune at this moment to make prophecies as to the duration of the fight and its development, to say nothing of its issue. Everything must be done from the international point of view to help the fighters. We must however, clearly recognise that success is only possible in accordance with the degree in which the British working class, in the process of the development and the intensification of the general strike, realises the necessity for changing its leaders and succeeds in so doing. The American proverb says that one should not swap horses when crossing a stream. This practical wisdom is only true within certain limits. It has never yet been possible to cross a revolutionary stream on the horse of reformism, and the class which entered the battle under opportunist leaders is compelled to change horses under fire. In this way, the position of the real revolutionary



elements of the British proletariat, particularly of the Communists, is predetermined. They will support the unity of mass action in every way, but they will not admit of any appearance of unity with the opportunist leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions. The most important piece of work for the truly revolutionary participants in the general strike will be fight relentlessly against every trace or act of treachery, and mercilessly expose reformist illusions. In so doing, they will not only help forward the chief and permanent task of developing new revolutionary cadres, without which the victory of the British proletariat is altogether impossible, but they will contribute directly to the success of the present strike by intensifying it, revealing its revolutionary tendencies, pushing the opportunists on one side and strengthening the position of the revolutionaries. The results of the strike—both the immediate results and those further ahead—will be all the more important, the more decisively the revolutionary will of the masses breaks down the barriers and obstacles of the counter-revolutionary leadership.

The strike in itself cannot alter the position of British capitalism, especially of the coal industry, in the world market. This requires the reorganisation of the entire British economic system. The strike is only an emphatic expression of this necessity. The programme of the reorganisation of British industry is the programme of the new power, the new State, the new class. Herein lies the fundamental significance of the general strike; it brings the question of power sharply to the forefront. A real victory for the general strike can only be found in the conquest of power by the proletariat and in the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. In view of the hopeless situation of British capitalism, the general strike should now less than ever be regarded as an instrument of reform or partial conquest. To put it more exactly, if the mineowners or the Government were to make this or that concession under pressure of the strike, these concessions would, in view of the whole situation, have neither a deep nor a permanent significance. This by no means implies that the present strike is faced by the alternative of all or nothing. Had the British proletariat been under a leadership which to some extent was in keeping with its class strength and the maturity of conditions, power would have passed from the hands of the Conservatives into the hands of the proletariat in the course of a few weeks. As it is, we can hardly reckon with an issue of this kind. This, however, does not mean that the strike is hopeless. The more widely it develops,

the more violently it shakes the foundations of capitalism, the more completely it rejects the treacherous and opportunist leaders, the more difficult will it be for bourgeois reaction to take up a counter-offensive, the less the proletarian organisations will suffer, the sooner the next decisive stage of the fight will come.

The present class conflict will be a tremendous lesson and have vast consequences, quite irrespective as to its immediate results. It will be clear to every worker in England that Parliament is incapable of solving the fundamental and vital tasks of the country. The question of the economic salvation of Britain will now present itself to the proletarian as a question of the conquest of power. A death blow will be given to all mediatory elements with conciliating, compromising and pseudo-pacifist tendencies. The Liberal Party, no matter how much its leaders may turn and twist, will emerge from this test even more humiliated than before it entered the fight. Within the Conservative Party, the die-hard elements will gain predominance. Within the Labour Party, the revolutionary wing will increase in influence and will find more complete expression. The Communists will push forward resolutely. The revolutionary development of Great Britain will make great strides forward.

Seen in the light of the mighty strike now developing, the questions of evolution and revolution, of peaceful development and the use of force, the question of reforms and of class dictatorship, will, in their full intensity, occupy the consciousness of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of British workers. Of this there can be no doubt. The British proletariat, which has been kept in a state of terrible ideological backwardness by the bourgeoisie and their Fabian agents, will now spring forward like a lion. Material conditions in England have long been ripe for Socialism. The strike has made the substitution of a proletarian State for the bourgeois one a question of the day. If the strike itself does not bring about this change, it will at least greatly hasten its approach, though in what period of time, we cannot of course say. We should be prepared, however, for the possibility of an early date.

MAY 13.

The defeat of the general strike at the present stage is

"according to the law of things," *i.e.*, arises from all the conditions of the origin and development of the strike. This defeat could be foreseen. There is nothing discouraging in it. But we will speak of the lessons of this defeat and of the lessons of the strike itself later.

L. TROTSKY.



# The British General Strike—Its Place in History

**I**N trying to throw some light on the recent British General Strike by using the utterances of Marx and Engels on the British Labour movement and its leaders, it has seemed to me expedient to enlarge on the subject somewhat in the sense which the title of this article indicates. Marx' and Engel's statements with respect to the British Labour movement cover the period from the 'forties to the 'nineties of last century. During this period the character and form of the proletarian class struggle in Great Britain underwent fundamental changes, hence the judgments of Marx and Engels can only be taken historically and in this sense utilised for a correct interpretation of the present. I will, therefore, endeavour in the light of their judgments to give a sketch of the most important stages of the proletarian class struggle, and thereby supply the historical background for the recent general strike. The latter is certainly an event of paramount importance, of great portent for the further trend of events. Like every other similar culminating point in the struggle, this one also is the resume of a long past which gives it its real setting. On the other hand it also throws a new and more searching light on the various stages of the struggle which preceded it. This article, of course, can only pretend to give a bird's-eye view.

The movement lends itself easily to a division into four parts.

## **Class Struggles during the Development of Big Industry—Chartism.**

Reference to the general strike of August, 1842, has already been made elsewhere. Incredible as it may sound, this event of more than 80 years ago is the only one which can be compared with the recent General Strike as far as



the **form of struggle** is concerned. With respect to magnitude that general strike was inferior to the recent strike, it lacked uniform organisational leadership, but perhaps, the spirit which animated it was more revolutionary than the spirit of the recent strike. Although the British working class did not then attempt armed struggle, in view of the large number of troops called up by the Government, it raised immediately after this struggle the question of the next revolutionary step, the question of armed rising, of "physical violence"—the term used in the debates of that time. However, the **political and social character** of the general strike of 1842, the degree of the development of the various classes, their correlation and finally the degree of capitalist development in Great Britain were **utterly different from what they are to-day**. There is only an outward similarity between August, 1842 and May, 1926. One must be perfectly clear on this point if a correct estimate is to be made of the present as well as of the past.

One of the chief differences between the two is emphasised by **Engels** in a letter to **Sorge** (dated December 3rd, 1892) in which he says:

"Also here in Great Britain the class struggles were more virulent during the **period of the development of big industry** and died down during the period of Great Britain's undisputed industrial world domination . . . . It is precisely the revolutionisation of time-honoured conditions through the development of industry which also revolutionises peoples' brains."

The entire period of the proletarian class struggle in Great Britain up to 1842—the final collapse of the **Chartist mass movement**, is an attendant phenomenon of this development-stage of big industry which gives it its social character.

However, the main feature of the **political** character of the proletarian class struggle lay in the fact that the **industrial bourgeoisie** together with the working class **was itself** **struggling for full political power in the State**. The Reform Act of 1842 had not granted full powers to the industrial bourgeoisie. Electoral rights were based on a property qualification, even more exclusive in the country than

in the towns. The number of electors in the country was increased from nearly 247,000 to 270,000, and in the towns (including many small country boroughs) from 188,000 to 286,000. The Reform Act, therefore, still left strong positions in the possession of the landowning aristocracy and "moneyed interests." In view of this the big industrialists tolerated the struggle of the workers for the extension of democracy—until the revolutionary class demands of the workers made them say, "thus far and no further!" Then came the breach, the bourgeoisie turned on the working class with full force. The general strike of August, 1842, marked this culmination, which was at the same time a turning point. Not the French February Revolution of 1848, as Engels indicated, but already August of 1842 was the turning point in the career of Chartism, in the first stage of the proletarian class struggle on British soil. The unsuccessful Chartist mass petition of April, 1848, merely showed that Chartism had already come to an end.

The **political** content of this stage of struggle is condensed in the "Charter"—the list of the political demands of the movement. This content is **universal suffrage** and the only proletarian feature in connection with this is the demand for **yearly** parliaments. But what was the social slogan? "A fair day's wages for a fair day's work." In the general strike of August, 1842, the workers demanded the Charter, namely universal franchise, and the wages of 1839. The other demands included the 10-hour day, labour protection, security of position in industrial enterprises, repeal of the new poor law (workhouses). Not one of these social slogans **directly** exceeded the capitalist limits, only "security of position" exceeded these limits indirectly, for free disposal of labour power of the industrial "reserve army," to quote Marx, is a vital condition of capitalism. Nevertheless, with unerring class instinct, the British bourgeoisie scented behind the vagueness and ambiguity of these slogans the proletarian revolution. **Once it had embarked on an independent revolutionary movement**, the proletariat was bound to go beyond its point of issue and burst through the bourgeois framework. With exactly the same sure class instinct the French bourgeoisie turned against the working class in 1848—a working class which "only" demanded work for the unemployed—and crushed it. It is a notable fact that most of the demands of 1842 were subsequently acceded to gradually by the British bourgeoisie: the 10-hour day, labour protection, the franchise. But only when they were no longer indefinite revolutionary demands capable of

development, but definitely stated reform demands which the working class advocated in the wake of the bourgeoisie. The same sure instinct we witness now in the British bourgeoisie, in a situation when the working class did not bring forward a single **directly** revolutionary demand, but when the progress of the movement which had been initiated was bound to bring revolutionary consequences.

The **impetus** for the general strike of 1842—just as to-day—was a **proposed reduction of wages** in some branches of industry. The year 1842 was one of industrial crisis, but the market situation was already taking a turn for the better when there came the lockout of the workers in a factory in Stalybridge, because they refused to accept the wage reduction. The lockout resulted in the workers downing tools in many factories, this was encouraged by the manufacturers because of the franchise struggle and the agitation against the Corn Laws. The workers vacillated between the two aims—universal franchise and wage demands. As the movement grew in volume the bourgeoisie took fright. Like one man, it turned towards the government, and took up arms against the workers.

“The bourgeoisie reverted to their former law and order attitude and sided with the government against the workers, whom it itself had at first incited and subsequently forced to rise. Members of the bourgeoisie and their faithful servants were sworn in as special constables—the German merchants in Manchester, too, participated in this and aimlessly paraded the streets of Manchester with their big sticks, smoking cigars. In Preston, the bourgeoisie gave the order to open fire on the people, and thus the unintentional popular rising had to contend not only with the military forces of the government, but also with the entire propertied class. The workers, who had really no aim to fight for, gradually dispersed and the insurrection came to an end without any bad consequences.”

This is how the young Friederich Engels described the affair in his “The Position of the Working Class in England in 1844,” which was published in the summer of 1845. This description is as characteristic of the stage of development of the young Engels as of the British Labour movement.

In the German-French Year Book, Engels made the following statement in his review of Carlyle’s work, “Past and Present”: “This was precisely the misfortune of the workers

in the summer insurrection in 1842, that they did not know against whom they should fight."

The fact that the class consciousness of the British workers of those days was so little developed, that they did not even know against whom they were to fight was, of course, due to the undeveloped state of British capitalism. The latter was only entering on its career, on the eve of a rapid and powerful upward development which gave a quietus for decades to come to the revolutionary wave, and even lulled to sleep the **independent** political movement of the working class.

Even to-day Engel's characteristic of the British working class of the '40's of the last century is of great interest. It shows at least that the traits of conservatism, narrow-mindedness, self-sufficiency, the lack of sense for generalisations, for theory, all of which are generally put down as the natural racial peculiarities of the British workers, are nothing of the kind, but are the result of historical circumstances, of the epoch of British industrial monopoly, which are bound to disappear with the latter. The British workers of the '40's are of a quite different type. They are free from national prejudice. They are "more humane," "irreligious," "more easy-going, less dominated by stable conceptions," than the bourgeoisie. "The British worker," says Engels, "is no longer a Britisher"; he praises the "stubborn invincible courage" of the British worker:

"It is precisely this calm preserverance, this stable determination which is put to the test a hundred times every day, which constitutes that side of the character of the British worker which demands respect." This trait we perceive even to-day among the struggling **masses**.

"The British worker," says Engels in another place of his work of 1845, "has no respect either for the Lords or the Queen. Politically he is a republican, but he is more than a mere republican . . . his democracy is not of a purely political kind."

Thus one can see that loyalty to the Crown and the Constitution, which is a characteristic of the present British Labour leaders and which until quite recently was a prejudice more or less firmly embedded among British workers—has not always been there and will not be there for ever.



And as to the mentality of the British workers of the 'forties, Engels declares that the "epoch-making events of the new philosophical political and poetical literature were read almost only by workers." In this connection Engels mentions D. R. Strauss, the critic of the New Testament, Proudhon, the French materialist, the British poets Shelley and Byron.

We also note that at that time, in 1845, Engels was already referring to America as a dangerous rival for Great Britain, as the future monopolist of the world market. It is an easy matter to ridicule this in the face of the development of the succeeding couple of decades. But what foresight—nothing short of genius—is this prophecy! The result of this first stage of the proletarian class struggle in Great Britain seems to come to nothing. But it only seems so. The reforms of the following decades, the extension of the franchise, the 10-hour day, the labour protection legislation are none the less the real fruit of the revolutionary storm and stress of the 'thirties and 'forties, even if they were not its immediate fruit. The British working class in the subsequent stage of the struggle had become tame and Liberal. It was able to reap this fruit because the impetuous generation of workers who preceded it had fought for it in a revolutionary manner. These reforms cannot be separated from the revolutionary élan which preceded them. In other words: no scientific Socialism, no Marxism, without the British class struggles of the 'thirties and 'forties. Their mental condensation, their scientific generalisation are to be found in the Marxist theory. In this metamorphosed form the British experiences of that epoch enrich the entire development of the Labour movement, particularly that of Europe.

Finally, the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) and the initiation of the British Free Trade era (the basis of British domination of the world market) is also the fruit of the revolutionary élan of the working class, which was garnered by British industrial and trading capital.

### **Monopoly of the World Market and the British Working Class.**

An utterly different aspect is presented by the British labour movement during the tempestuous development of

British industry and British world trade, between 1850 and 1870, the years of the incontestable industrial and world trade monopoly of Great Britain. This epoch saw the development of those traits of the British Labour movement which have been for such a long time the delight of the bourgeoisie of all countries (whilst in the countries of "industrial development in its initial stages" the Labour movement repeated the stormy traits of the British Labour movement of the thirties and forties in a more pronounced form). National narrow-mindedness, conservatism, craft separatism of the labour aristocracy who would have nothing to do with the unskilled workers, rejection of Socialism, permeation with the ideas of Liberalism, respect for bourgeois morality and the public opinion of the bourgeoisie, loyalty to King and constitution and religion, careerism and venality of leaders, the shunning of theoretical generalisations. The economic and social description of this period is to be found primarily in the first volume of Marx's "Capital." The correspondence between Marx and Engels dating from that period contains a drastic characteristic of the then British Labour movement and its leaders. For instance, the term "bourgeois proletariat." Engel's letter to Marx on October 7th, 1858 (No. 461 of the Marx-Engels Correspondence) contains the following statement :

"The Jones affair is very disgusting. He held a meeting here (in Manchester *A. Th.*) and the tone of his speech was quite in the spirit of the new alliance (with the Liberals). After this affair one could almost believe that the British proletarian movement in its traditional-Chartist form is doomed to perish before it can again develop in a new form possessing vitality. And yet it is difficult to say what this new form will be like. Moreover, it seems to me that, in connection with the former; and more or less successful attempts at such an alliance, Jones' new move has something to do with the fact that the British proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations seems to be intent on having a bourgeois labour aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat **side by side** with the bourgeoisie. In a nation which exploits the whole world this has, of course, a certain amount of justification. In such a case only a couple of downright bad years would be a help, but since the gold discoveries, this is not a likely proposition."

Five years later, Marx wrote to Engels somewhat in the same strain :

" We must wait and see how soon British workers will emancipate themselves from their seeming bourgeois-infection." (No. 706, April 4, 1863.)

In the following year, the International Workingmen's Association was founded with Marx at its head. The British joined it first and foremost in order to put a stop to the unfair competition of the Continental workers, to make secure the threatened right to combine and to secure an extension of the franchise. The International put its whole energy into the struggle for these aims. The British bourgeoisie countered the movement by extending in 1867 the franchise so as to include the labour aristocracy (Disraeli's Franchise Reform) and by making some concessions with respect to the legalisation of the trade unions. These partial results damped considerably the enthusiasm of the trade union leaders for the International. Marx wrote thus to Engels (No. 842, April 6, 1866) :

" The fact is this that the British leaders in London, after we (the International) had made a position for them (to which must also be added the incapacity of every Britisher to do two things at the same time) have cooled down in respect of the closer precincts of our movement."

And a few months later, on the occasion of the monster demonstration of the workers in Hyde Park for the Franchise Reform, when it came to violent collisions with the police :

" The thing is certain—these stubborn John Bulls, whose craniums seem to be specially manufactured for the bludgeons of the constables, will come to nothing without a downright sanguinary collision with the ruling classes."

But just because of the apparent consequences of such a imaginary conflict with the workers, Disraeli's Tory Govern-

ment next year introduced the franchise reform—in the limited form above mentioned. Thereby the Government drove a wedge between the labour aristocracy and the mass of unskilled workers. In connection with the recent general strike, we see on the contrary that the **government** steered its course for a sanguinary collision on the correct assumption that the trade union leaders would shrink from it because of its inevitable revolutionary consequences.

With respect to the general election of 1868, Engels wrote to Marx (No. 1065, November 18, 1868) :

“ Everywhere the proletariat is the rag tag and bob-tail of the official parties, and if a party has been strengthened through the new electorate, it is the Tory Party . . . . But nevertheless it remains a terrible testimony of the low niveau of the British proletariat. The **priesthood** has given evidence of unexpected power, and so has kow-towing to respectability. Not a single Labour candidate has a ghost of a chance, but Mylord Tomnod or some parvenu snob carries off the votes of the workers with the greatest ease.”

The Paris Commune and its open advocacy by the International frightened away the British Labour leaders altogether from the International. Marx denounced at the Hague Congress (1872) most of the British Labour leaders of that period as bought by the bourgeoisie, which certainly did not make them more friendly disposed.

What is possible at a time when the working class is not yet ready for a struggle for political power is very definitely stated in a letter written by Marx to the American Party friend **Bolte** (Sorge Correspondence, letter dated November 23, 1871) :

“ Wherever the working class is not yet sufficiently organised to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, *i.e.*, the political might of the ruling classes, it must certainly be educated for it by continuous agitation against the policy of the ruling classes which



is inimical to working class interests. If this is not done it will remain a plaything in their hands, as shown by the September revolution in France and to a certain extent by the game successfully carried on in Great Britain by Gladstone and Co."

*Re* the desertion of the International by the British workers after 1871, Marx wrote to Sorge (April 4, 1874) as follows :

" In Great Britain the International is for the time being as good as dead. The Federal Council in London exists as such only nominally, although some of its members are active in their individual capacity. The great event here is the awakening of the agricultural labourers. The failure of their first attempt does no harm, on the contrary. As to the urban workers, it is a pity that all the leaders lock, stock and barrel did not get into parliament. This is the surest way to get rid of the rabble."

The Liberal stage in the British Labour movement coincides with the epoch of the undisputed trade and world market monopoly of Great Britain. This monopoly has left its imprint on the brains of the workers of the **old** trade unions, namely, the aristocratic trade unions of skilled workers. These imprints are visible even to-day, but the Labour leaders still caught in the net of Manchester-Liberal conceptions are to-day an **exception**. The most important premise for the termination of this epoch, namely, abolition of the British industrial and world trade monopoly was created through the termination of the bourgeois revolutions on the Continent after the Franco-German War. The struggle for industrial and trade supremacy of the new industrial powers, above all Germany, did not however, make itself felt immediately. It took the industrial opponents of Great Britain almost to the end of the eighties to be a match for that country and to be able to begin the competitive struggle in good earnest. The period of the seventies and eighties is one of **relative** industrial stagnation.

It is also during this period that the third franchise

reform in Great Britain, that of 1885, took place through which a new electorate was created and the number of electors in rural districts was trebled. Through this reform a certain section of agricultural labourers was given the vote.

### A Breach in the British Industrial Monopoly.

During the next epoch, from the end of the eighties up to 1914 a breach was made in the **supremacy** of Great Britain in industry and on the world market. Great Britain still has the **leadership** in its hands, it is still the **first** industrial and commercial power, but it is obliged to defend this position with all its might against rapidly developing competitors. Competitive struggle for colonial countries—imperialist rivalry becomes more acute. Export of capital takes precedence of export of commodities, heavy industry takes precedence of manufactured goods. Capitalist concentration and centralisation make rapid progress, the big capitalist monopolies take the lead. On the whole this is a capitalist “storm and stress epoch.” Food prices rise, armament expenditure grows. The industrial progress of Great Britain does not keep pace with that of Germany and the U.S.A., but it manages to retain its dominating position mostly through the colossal accumulation of finance capital, through its thoroughly developed money market organisation and trade connections. In the ranks of the British bourgeoisie the old free trade Liberalism is becoming more and more disintegrated, imperialist and tariff reform ideas take possession of the bourgeois mentality.

The foundation on which the British Labour movement stagnated in the preceding epoch is undermined both materially and ideologically. The masses of unskilled workers are set in motion. The new “trade unionism” comes into being. Just as the imperialist ideology seizes hold on the bourgeoisie, Socialism—as a general trend of thought—begins to permeate the foremost ranks of the British proletariat. Small Socialist Parties spring up which are, however, of a more or less sectarian character. The independent class movement of the workers becomes co-ordinated in the Labour Party. The latter is the co-ordination of trade unions for political action **within the limits of Parliament**. To be quite accurate, the Labour Party is not a party, but only a reservoir for party formation, the expression for the **movement of the working class in the direction of Party formation**. The Labour Party is a decidedly reformist and opportunist conglomeration firmly convinced of gradual and peaceful developing into Socialism, of the all-redeeming strength of bourgeois

democracy, of the inacceptability of violence in the class struggle. The Socialism of this stage is only a mixture of Socialism and Liberalism.

The beginnings of this new development were perceived by Engels already in the second part of the eighties (Marx died in 1883).

He wrote as follows on September 16th, 1886, in a letter to Sorge :

“ Here the (Socialist) movement is on the one hand in the hands of adventurers and on the other hand of cranks and sentimental Socialists. The masses as yet stand aside although the **beginnings** of a movement are also noticeable in that direction. But it will take some time for the masses to come into motion and this is just as well, for it will give time for proper leaders to develop.”

Three years later Engels wrote to Sorge (December 7th, 1889) :

“ The movement **is** now at last in motion and as I think for good, but it is not downright Socialist . . . . Formally the movement is a trade union movement, but totally different from the old trade unions, the skilled labourers, the labour aristocracy.

“ People proceed quite differently now, they bring much bigger masses into the struggle, they bring forward more far-reaching demands : the eight hour day, general federation of all organisations, complete solidarity . . . . Moreover, the people themselves look upon their present demands in the light of provisional demands, although they do not as yet know for what ultimate aim they are working. But this vague notion has taken possession of them sufficiently to induce them to elect **only bona fide** Socialists as leaders. Like everyone else they must learn by their own experience and from the consequences

of their own mistakes. But this will not take very long as they, contrary to the old trade unions deride any allusion to the common interests of capital and labour.

“ The most disgusting thing here is ‘respectability’ so firmly embedded in the working class. Socially society is divided into innumerable fully recognised grades, each one of which has its own pride, and also the innate respect for their ‘betters’ and ‘superiors’ is so old and so firmly established that the bourgeoisie can easily use the art of alluring and decoying. I am not at all sure for instance, if John Burns is in his inmost heart not more proud of his popularity with Cardinal Manning, the Lord Mayor and the bourgeoisie in general than of his popularity with his own class.”

It is a well-known fact that subsequently John Burns went over to the bourgeoisie, and became Minister in a Liberal Cabinet.

On the significance of the defeats in the British class struggles, Engels wrote to Sorge in the following year (February 8th, 1890) :

“ The Schelswig-Holsteiners and their descendents in Great Britain and America cannot be taught by lecturing, this stubborn and conceited lot must be made to feel it on their own backs . . . . With trade unions, etc., a beginning must be made if it is to be a mass movement, and every further step must be forced on them through a defeat.”

Concerning the **Fabians** (Sydney Webb, Bernard Shaw, etc.), Engels wrote in the same letter :

“ . . . . a well-meaning set of educated bourgeois

who have refuted Marx with the Jevon's rotten vulgar economics, which is so vulgar that one can make anything out of it, even Socialism. The main object is, as across the Channel, to convert the **citizen** to Socialism and thus introduce the thing peacefully and constitutionally."

A detailed characteristic of the then British Labour movement we find in Engel's letter to Sorge of April 19, 1890, it runs :

" In a country with such an old political and Labour movement there is always a colossal amount of traditionally inherited rubbish which has to be got rid of gradually. Such are the prejudices of the skilled unions—engineers, bricklayers, carpenters and joiners, type compositors, etc., all of which must be broken: the jealousies of the various trades which in the hands and brains of the leaders develop into open hostility and underhand manœuvring, then there are the conflicting ambitions and intrigues of the leaders—one wants to get into Parliament, another ditto, another in the County Council or on the School Board, another again wants to found a general centralisation of all workers, another a newspaper, another a club, etc., etc. In a word, there is friction and friction. Then added to this there is the Socialist League which looks down upon everything which is not directly revolutionary (which means here in England just as with you everything which does not limit itself to empty phraseology and nothing else), and the Federation (the Socialist Federation is meant) which still behaves as though outside its ranks there are only donkeys and muddlers, although it is due to the new turn the movement has taken that **it** has again been able to secure a certain number of followers. In short only those who see the surface would say everything is chaos and personal animosity. But **under** this surface the movement goes on, it gets hold of ever-growing sections of the population and just of the hitherto stagnant **lowest** strata, and the day is not far distant when



these strata will suddenly **recognise their own power**, when it will dawn upon them that they are this colossal ever-moving mass, on that day short shrift will be given to all the petty quarrels and animosities."

In the following year Engels wrote to Sorge (December 31st, 1892) :

" During the last few years Socialism has penetrated deep into the masses in the industrial districts, and I count on these masses to keep the leaders in order."

On the general form of the Anglo-Saxon movement Engels remarks (Letter to Sorge of January 16, 1895) :

" The development of the Anglo-Saxon race with its ancient Germanic love of freedom is certainly a very peculiarly slow, zig-zag development (here in Great Britain the zig-zags are small, with you they are colossal), a tacking against the wind, but nevertheless progress is being made."

The opportunist-reformist boundaries of the movement came very drastically to light on the threshold of the world war. But the latter created conditions which compelled the British class struggle to move to a higher plane—the plane of the revolutionary struggle for power.

### **The Decline of British Capitalism.**

The new conditions created by the war are those of the decline of British capitalism. Decades before this situation arose Engels made the remark that when side by side with Great Britain, Germany and America will also have reached full industrial development the world market would be too small for them, unemployment would be colossal and continuous and the Socialist revolution would come on the order of the day. The world war has more than realised this situation. German industry has been thrown back by it, it is true, but on the other hand French industry has developed

more rapidly. American industry has developed enormously and has outstripped that of Great Britain. Moreover, in a number of colonial countries new industries have sprung up. By losing its monopoly British industry has also now lost its leading position. The productive forces of Great Britain are far in excess of export and investment possibilities. Hence, mass unemployment, relative industrial over-population has become a **permanent** phenomenon in Great Britain. To all appearances Germany is in the same position. This decline has come very vividly to light in the British coal industry.

But declining industry, like budding industry, revolutionises "time-honoured conditions," but no longer pre-capitalist, but the capitalist conditions themselves. The revolutionary movement of the earlier epoch has its rebirth on a higher plane. And again the movement begins first of all with mere partial aims which are seemingly not revolutionary. But the fact that the British working class demanded, as in the recent general strike, a proper standard of life in the declining industry, not to become its victim, has revolutionary **consequences**. Another consequence is that the bourgeoisie and the capitalist system as a whole must believe in this. That is why the British bourgeoisie takes up immediately the struggle as a struggle for political power. It mobilises the army and the navy, it passes an emergency act and prepares to defeat the workers by force of arms. It further threatens to deprive trade unions of their legal existence, to confiscate their funds, etc.

Thus the movement collides with the boundaries of bourgeois democracy. The leaders, full of traditional veneration for it, shrink from this, they break off the general strike just because the mass movement was still developing and the next stage was bound to be armed collision, open revolutionary struggle, and thereby the breaking down of democratic boundaries.

Nothing shows more distinctly the higher plane of the present stage of the Labour movement in Great Britain than a comparison with Chartism. Democracy was then still a revolutionary slogan, to-day it is a reactionary shackle on the movement, and this is brought to the consciousness of the working class through the mass experience of the general strike. Then Socialism was a far distant ideal, to-day it is

a question of life or death for the British working class. Both however, the struggle for proletarian dictatorship and for Socialism, demand the existence of a revolutionary mass party. Not only the content but also the organisational forms of the movement in Great Britain must be put on a higher plane than ever before.

The general strike of August, 1942 ushered in the decline of the revolutionary Labour movement, coming as it did on the threshold of the most powerful rise of British capitalism. The general strike of May, 1926, in the midst of the decline of British capitalism, ushers in on the contrary the rise of the Labour movement for the struggle for dictatorship and Socialism.

A. THALHEIMER.



# From Chartists to Communists

**C** DELISLE BURNS, the reformist, wrote in an article reprinted by the German paper "Gesellschaft" in November, 1925: "Even European Socialists often do not understand how little interest Britishers have in general theories about capitalism. In England, it is not general principles that push us onwards, but empiric facts. And we therefore prefer to say that we have changed nothing when we have radically changed the entire situation. We still have the King and the Archbishop of Westminster just as a thousand years ago. But what kind of king and bishop are they, after all?" The opportunists of all lands regard this characteristic of the British Labour movement as though it were an eternal truth, a deduction from the national character of the British people, which, in their opinion, was, is and will be a people which denies sudden changes in history and advances cautiously, empirically, along the path of gradual reformism.

One does not need much convincing that this is by no means an absolute truth, that it is historically limited and only good for a certain period of British history, now already beginning to be relegated into the realms of the past. In the May General Strike these opportunist traits had already become only partially visible—they were only evident in the leaders of the movement. At the dawn of the British Labour movement there was not even any question of such traits. And it may be said with certainty that in the near future they will again lose force in the movement, judging by the present rate of progress of the class struggle in Great Britain.

The providential gradualness of the British Labour movement is a reformist illusion which will collapse before our very eyes as rapidly as did the illusion about an eternal standstill in China.

A study of the present great British strike naturally calls for a comparison with the first great General Strike in England, during the Chartist days in 1842. Chartism, which had profound economic causes, which was a result of the first orgy of British capitalism during the Liberal era when the bourgeoisie was attaining power, by no means suffered from the "economism"\* characteristic of the subsequent long period of the British Labour movement. It entered immediately into the political struggle, which assumed more and more revolutionary forms in proportion with its development.

According to prevalent prejudice, there can be no mass political parties, in the strict European sense of the word, in the British and American Labour movements. This, it is averred, is a specifically Anglo-Saxon feature of the Labour movement. Chartism showed that this assertion is as conventional and historically limited as is the hypothesis of an inborn opportunism of the British proletariat. The "National Charter Association" in the fire of the revolutionary struggle, despite the injunctions of the law against the formation of Labour organisations on a national scale, became a political Labour Party with an elected executive Committee, periodical congresses and membership dues and cards, and developed in the course of two or three years into a mass party with more than 400 local branches and nearly 40,000 organised members. In an atmosphere of a mass revolutionary movement, the Chartist Party reached dimensions within two or three years, which the Independent Labour Party has barely attained at the present moment, despite its score of years.

The Chartist movement, in proportion with its growth, intensified its method of struggle; nor did it do so gropingly or empirically. At the very beginning a plan was drawn up for the gradual extension of the movement; the convention of a general congress, the petition to Parliament with a million signatures, and, finally, if the petition were rejected, "a solemn and sacred strike," *i.e.*, a general strike. When the petition had been presented the Convention Commission lution such as a simultaneous run on the banks (a measure began to discuss "subsequent measures" which at first had

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\* "Economism" was the creed of those in the Russian pre-war Labour Movement who said "Politics always follow economics" and "the only important struggle for the workers is the economic struggle."



been left an open question. The Commission recommended to the Convention a number of "peaceful" methods of revolution which the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies also resorted to in 1905) then the arming of all Chartists, and finally, a general strike of one month—the "sacred month." The Chartist, Harney, went further than this, stating that nothing would be obtained through the petition and that the general strike could only be successful if it was transformed into an armed rising. Meanwhile, in reality, the movement did not get any further than the general strike of 1842. Matters did not go as far as armed encounters, unless we count the attempts of Frost to rescue prisoners by violence.

The particular characteristic of the Chartist movement, sharply distinguishing it from the movement of the British proletariat which reached its culminating point in the May General Strike, is the complete conformity between the ideology of the movement and its mass spontaneity. As the movement developed, the leadership became gradually freed from bourgeois elements, broke more and more with bourgeois Liberalism and Radicalism, and grew more and more revolutionary in character.

The idea of a political struggle of the workers did not sprang up in the industrial centres of England, but in London, the radical-bourgeois intellectual centre. The initiator of the movement was the moderate Owenite, Lovett, the founder of the London "Workingmen's Association." Lovett, who was under the influence of the bourgeois radical Place, at first set before the "Association" very modest tasks. After a year the "Association" came out with the demand for complete democratic Parliamentary reform and invited Lovett to draw up the necessary petition to Parliament. After a few months, a new political Labour Party had been formed, whose first manifesto was also drawn up by the London "Workingmen's Association." The programme of this Party was the famous Charter. The London Association and its founder Lovett, moved to the Left under the influence of the growing movement. Very soon, however, they became an obstacle in its path. The opportunist policy of the leaders led to a split in the Association and the formation of a new "Democratic Association," headed by Harvey. This "Democratic Association" renounced the former compromising policy of the London Workingmen's Association in respect to the bourgeois radicals. Its proclamation stated :

"The low, hypocritical treacherous bourgeoisie has joined in the movement only in order to split it. Everything for which the bourgeoisie has at any time fought has proved to be harmful to the people, illusions and deceit, and the productive classes in order to reform society should rely upon themselves and only upon themselves." ("London Democrat," April 13, 1839, retranslated from the Russian.)

Freed from bourgeois elements, the leadership of the movement passed into the hands of the proletarian leaders, O'Connor, O'Brian, Frost and Tylor. These leaders kept vigilant watch to see that the movement was not switched on to a Liberal course, and waged an energetic struggle against the Liberals, Cobden and Bright; a Chartist orator, agitating for the repeal of the corn laws said in respect of the Cobdenites:

"Do not let yourselves be deceived by the bourgeoisie twice; they want to obtain the repeal of the Corn Laws, not for your sakes but for their own advantage. 'Give us cheap bread!' they cry, but in reality they are thinking: 'Give us low wages.' Do not listen to their hypocrisy, stand by the Charter. Without the franchise you are slaves." (R. G. Gammage, "History of the Chartist Movement," p. 82.)

As the movement developed, the struggle between the moderates and the Mountain increased. It is characteristic that the moderates were called the fraction of "moral force;" and more revolutionary elements were called the fraction of "physical force." The transfer of the Convention from London to the industrial centre, Birmingham, ensured the victory of the "physical force" fraction, *i.e.*, the revolutionary wing of the movement.

Chartism suffered defeat: and the British Labour movement began to decline, not so much under the influence of this defeat as under the influence of the sweeping development of capitalism in England, which commenced after the repeal of the Corn Laws and was accompanied by very flexible social-reformist tactics on the part of the bourgeoisie. This period of complete decline prevailed for half a century. In

England itself Chartism seemed to disappear without leaving a trace, giving place to a trade unionism which corrupted the British proletariat and subjected it ideologically to the influence of the bourgeoisie. But for the world Labour movement Chartism had tremendous significance as the first distinct manifestation of the class struggle of the workers; its lessons impregnated the ideology and practice of the whole Continental Labour movement.

If we wish to compare the present action of the British proletariat with its first glorious activity in the epoch of Chartism, we must distinguish strictly between the rôle of the working masses and that of their ideologists and leaders. In respect to the first factor of the movement, the mass *élan*, not only can it stand comparison with the mass enthusiasm in the Chartist epoch, but at the present time this *élan* is immeasurably greater than in the '30's and '40's of the last century. The general strike of 1842 met with defeat mainly because the movement did not become sufficiently widespread, because the workers of the commercial-agricultural south of England, of London and the Southern Counties, did not support the proletariat of the industrial North. The strike proceeded in a concerted fashion only in the textile districts, in Lancashire, Manchester, Yorkshire and Staffordshire. We see quite a different state of affairs at the present time. The present wave of the British Labour movement, which began to rise in the years just preceding the war, received its impulse not from the textile industry but from heavy industry and at once began to spread with the rapidity of an epidemic. Despite half a century's trade union tradition, despite the craft spirit of the British trade unions, their extremely spirit and scattered nature, despite the fact that the leadership of the trade unions was in the hands of professional bureaucrats and labour aristocrats who regarded the trade unions not as fighting organisations but as organisations for mutual aid and médiation between labour and capital—despite all these factors the avalanche of the British Labour movement had been set in motion and swept through all barriers. In order to get a clear idea of the change which took place in the British movement even before the war broke out, under the influence of the changed economic position of the British working class as a result of Great Britain's lost economic monopoly, it is sufficient to glance at the statistics of British strikes.

Statistics of British strikes and lock-outs commencing

from 1893 appeared in the June number of the "Ministry of Labour Gazette." If we divide these statistics into three periods, pre-war days, war-time and the post-war period, we obtain the following picture.

			Average number of workers striking or locked out per year.		Average number of working days lost per year.
1893-1913	...	...	300,000	...	8,750,000
1914-1918	...	...	630,000	...	5,400,000
1919-1924	...	...	1,300,000	...	31,000,000

In 1919 more than 2½ million workers were out, losing 35,000,000 working days, either on their own initiative or owing to lock-outs.

In 1920 the strike wave subsided very little; 1,932,000 struck or were locked out and 26,570,000 days were lost. The following year the number locked out was almost the same—1,801,000 but the number of working days lost was ten times the average number of working days lost annually in pre-war years—i.e., 85,870,000 days. That was the year of the great miners' lock-out affecting nearly 1,200,000 workers. During that year the British miners were defeated after Black Friday, thanks to the treachery of the trade union leaders who failed to support the miners. But the movement was not smashed. In July of last year the capitalist offensive was beaten off, and the Trade Union Congress at Scarborough, which met after "Red Friday" showed how the minds of the British proletariat had become revolutionised. During the recent general strike, the volume of the workers' movement and the impulse of their proletarian solidarity reached unprecedented heights. Four and a half million workers struck in unison without any hesitation, until the shameful capitulation of the General Council astonished them like a thunder storm on a fine day.

The May General Strike, unlike that of Chartist days, was defeated not through any lack of staunchness, or unanimity on the part of the working masses, but owing to the bankruptcy of the leaders of the movement. Both in respect to discipline and organisation the May General Strike stands on a much higher level than the general strike of the Chartist

epoch. The latter developed spontaneously, though the Chartists had conducted propaganda for the "sacred month" for a number of years. In May, 1926, 4½ million workers arose at once in two relays during the period of three days, in answer to the summons of the General Council, and there is no doubt whatsoever that had the General Council found it necessary to call out millions of workers in other categories, they would have responded immediately. Certain categories of workers, as is generally known, were straining at the leash so much that it was all the General Council could do to restrain them. All this goes to show that the working masses of Great Britain stood the test and proved themselves ripe for the struggle for power.

The present leaders of the British movement and their ideology present quite a different picture. To an incomparably greater degree than the masses they drag at the tail of traditions of trade unionism and Liberal policy three-quarters of a century old. Whereas the Chartist leaders stood at the head of the movement, led it forward and forged a revolutionary ideology for it, the present "leaders" (if we may thus term them) put a brake on the movement, narrowed down its scope, damped its revolutionary spirit, and finally at a moment when the movement was prepared to rise spontaneously to a higher pitch, they betrayed it. The British proletarian masses made a colossal step forward as compared with the proletariat of the Chartist epoch, the leaders of the British proletariat and its ideology, on the contrary, stand infinitely lower than the ideologists of the Chartist movement.

In order to show clearly to what a low level the ideology of the British leaders has fallen as compared with the Chartist epoch, we will compare here the political views of the Chartist leader O'Brien, as expressed in various articles, with the political views of MacDonald as formulated in his book "A Policy for the Labour Party," published in 1920.

O'Brien says in regard to class collaboration :

"Do not believe those who aver that the middle classes and the working classes have the same interests.



That is a vile deception. Hell is not further from heaven and fire not more hostile to water than the interests of the bourgeoisie to the interests of the producing classes." ("Poor Man's Guardian," August 17, 1833, retranslated.)

Now let us hear what MacDonald says on the same theme :

"We must without delay discover new class alliances and affinities, mainly because that is a moral necessity, but also because economic changes owing to the war have made it politically necessary. We omit to think of a society of many economic and social functions, but only of one class—the useful class. We must begin to work at that spiritual unity which class destroys. Therefore we must understand each other. It is not differences in thought and knowledge that divide man, but differences in ignorance. The old prejudice against labour is baseless—baseless in idea and baseless in fact. Modern tendencies omit the middle and professional classes even more than they do labour."

" . . . . The ideas of the Labour movement do comprehend the interests of all classes that give service to the community."

MacDonald rejects the craft spirit of certain British trade unions, such as the miners and textile workers, who put forward as candidates for Parliament their own mining or textile members. But he does not contrast this with real class psychology; on the contrary, there is a complete absence of any class standpoint.

"Responsibility (arising we presume as a result of participation or preparedness for participation of the Labour Party in the Government—A.M.) shatters all the bonds of narrow dogmatic theories" says MacDonald. "Co-operation breaks the barriers between class and class which suspicion so assiduously erects; enfranchisement produces the reasonable mind." The deductions from this are as follows: "Whereas Continental Socialism was a product of dogmatic

materialism with the class war as its guiding idea, in this country humanism was the note of Socialist thought and the whole community its concern."

What was the opinion of O'Brien on Government, on legality, on Parliament? "The real fact," writes O'Brien,

"is that the government is made by the profit-men to protect them in their exorbitant profits, rents and impositions on the people who labour. Is it the government who makes the laws, or is it not, on the contrary, the great profit-men who make them to enrich themselves, and then leave the government to execute them? . . . . The capitalists everywhere create oppression; the government is their watchman . . . . the working people are the oppressed."

That is how O'Brien reveals the class nature of the Government. Here is how he qualifies legality :

"One might have thought that in England there were no other crimes other than breaking laws, whereas in reality nine-tenths of the crimes in our country are indeed committed in accordance with the laws and by the legislators and their supporters themselves. Robbery for instance, is a crime; but who is the greatest robber in England? Who but this same written law in England. It is a gigantic robber with tens of thousands of hands with which it dips into our pockets simultaneously. And moreover, it is armed with still more hundreds of thousands of hands, etc." ("The Destructive," March 23, 1833.)

He gives a no more respectful opinion of British Parliament :

"Before the Reform Bill had become law, one might have supposed that the middle classes had certain feelings in common with the workers. This illusion does not exist any longer. It has completely disappeared with the publication of the cursed law. Not a single

worker will now expect justice, morality or generosity from a parliament of profit-men." ("Twopenny Despatch," September 10, 1836.)

Now let us hear what MacDonald has to say about these social categories: What is Society? "Society," says MacDonald, "is a unity of those who give necessary service to each other. A unity of mutual helpers performing a great diversity of functions in the the great diversity of ways, all equal and yet different. That being so, how can the Party seek to capture Parliament in the interests of the mere class? How can its unions be limited to wages and to getting for the workmen everything that can be wrung out of a community which he treats as a victim."

In order to save poor bourgeois society, the poor bourgeois State, the poor Parliament from the encroachment of the insatiable workers, the workers' leaders (save the mark!) says: "The country needs reality in legislation, and would be blessed if the doors of Parliament could be barred against demagogues . . . . (Read: "against Communists" —A.M.). A man who can look on (and perhaps lend a hand) and with unruffled (perhaps even amused) mind behold great things and institutions cheapened is no friend of his people."

What was the attitude of the Chartist O'Brien on the question of Reform and Revolution?:

"So long as the existence of the worker depends upon the capital of others, he is compelled to eke out the existence of a pauper . . . . There is only one method—that is to overthrow the whole system. There can be no reforming of separate parts of it. It is easier to reconstruct the whole thing than repair it piece by piece." ("Poor Man's Guardian," February 22, 1834.) And then he goes on to say:

"Let the historian come forward who could cite even one case when the rich in any country or at any time renounced their power out of love for justice or as

a result of a simple appeal of conscience to their hearts. There is no such case. Force and force alone has always appealed to their humanity." ("Poor Man's Guardian," June 21, 1834.)

And here is how Mr. MacDonald argues on this theme: "War exhausts itself in revolution, and the more completely the war has been fought, the freer become the passions of anarchy and the more shattered are the mind and fabric of order . . . . If civilisation is receiving its death blow, it is not so much by what happened during the war, as by what has happened since" (read "by the revolution"—A.M.) "Revolution," he says, "is used in two senses. It may mean simply a great change brought about by organic transforming efforts; it may mean a violent outburst of force and seizure of power and its temporary arbitrary use" . . . . In the latter case, "but for its remnants of destruction and its scare," it leaves "little trace behind." Criticising the Russian methods of revolution the author also comes down on those who think that the proletariat can foist its will on society by means of a general strike, by means of "direct action": ". . . . the policy of 'direct action' is only an application of the policy of the blockade to the class struggle . . . . The direct actionist has no idea of constructive work. He is either a pure revolutionist (MacDonald can find no worse swear word!—A.M.) or believes in the blockade. No political party can live on such creeds . . . ."

When the danger of a general strike began to hover over Great Britain MacDonald spoke against it in a still more decisive manner. A few months before the strike he said that many people were now talking about the organisation of an alliance of miners, railwaymen and metal workers. One could not conceive a greater misfortune for the country than an alliance of trade unions and a capitalist bloc rushing at each other's throats in a mutually destructive encounter.

In conclusion a word or two about religion. The Char-  
tist O'Brien writes:

"Millions should always remember that the rich believe in religion only as a political measure for holding

the producing classes in subjection to the rich." ("Poor Man's Guardian," December 12, 1835.)

And Mr. MacDonald ends his book with a real Sunday sermon on a political theme: "Society girding up its loins for a new pilgrimage towards sweetness and light, setting its foot again upon the road leading onwards to righteousness, has called up the Labour movement to its aid, and has given the Party a vision and a policy. Will the country give it a majority?" Here it is not a leader of the Labour Party speaking through the mouth of MacDonald, but a parson such as the serene Archbishop of Westminster, of whom the British reformist Delisle Burns speaks with such emotion.

The comparison of O'Brien with MacDonald clearly shows us that in one case we are dealing with a real proletarian leader and in the other with a broker whose sole task is to bring disintegration into the ranks of the fighting workers' army by making oily mealy-mouthed speeches, and thus prepare its defeat and capitulation for the capitalist class which is armed to the teeth.

MacDonald belongs to the Right Wing of the Labour Party, like Thomas, leader of the Right Wing of the Trade Unions. Under the influence of the revolutionising of the working masses in the Labour Party and even more in the Trade Unions, a Left Wing has also sprung up. This of course is an extremely symptomatic fact. The existence of this "Left Wing" undoubtedly facilitated the offensive of the proletariat. Were it not for this Left Wing the General Council would not in any case have declared the General Strike. But a considerable majority of this "Left Wing" was so enmeshed in the old traditions of trade unionism and Liberal-Labour politics, it had such confused views, that as soon as the struggle began to be more acute they revealed their entire unreliability. Therefore, one should not be astonished that at the decisive moment the majority of representatives of the "Left Wing" lost their heads and only facilitated the task of the Right Wing—that of betraying the movement. Only in the event of the Communist Party becoming a mass Party could it head the movement at such a critical moment, and so carry the "Left Wing" with it and preserve it from collapse.



In view of the ostensible revolutionising of the working masses and their increased mistrust in the old leaders, the latter are trying in every way to construct a bridge between themselves and the working masses. For such a bridge, on the one hand they used many members of the "Left Wing" with whom they maintained contact despite their sharp opposition, and on the other hand, all kinds of manoeuvres for preserving unity of leadership of the movement between the Right and Left Wings. When the Trade Union Congress at Scarborough proved that the British working masses had gone decidedly Leftwards, when it passed a number of political resolutions moved by the Communists and in sharp contradiction to all traditions of Liberal-Labour politics, the Right Wing in accordance with these tactics did not attack these resolutions but endeavoured to interpret them falsely showing that in substance the Right Wing were saying the same thing but in other words.

An article by Herbert Tracey, one of the heads of the "Research Department" formed by the Labour Party jointly with the trade unions is extremely instructive in this respect. This article is entitled "What is the standpoint of the British Trade Unions?" and appeared in the December number of "Gesellschaft." The author of the article endeavours to prove in every way that the Scarborough Congress by no means signifies a break with old traditions of the British Labour movement: "It is absolutely incorrect to assert," he says, "that the tendency of the trade unions towards an increased and more independent activity in the economic struggle means a more radical and aggressive trade union policy than the policy that the Labour Party is prepared to conduct in this field." "Of course, one can easily arouse the belief that the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party had a different attitude to the Dawes Plan if we are limited to the statement that the Congress rejected it and the Labour Party accepted it." This, says Tracey, is not true. There is no great difference between "yes" and "no."

The ex-chairman of the Labour Party, C. T. Cramp, also stated that the Dawes Plan was not an ideal for the Labour Party: "We do not think," he said, "of recognising the

Dawes Plan for an unrestricted period." The disagreements between the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress on this important question are in his opinion more superficial than fundamental. Cramp proposed accepting the Dawes Plan only under present conditions; for the rejection of the Dawes Plan would amount to a summons to the German workers to break the already shaky equilibrium of European peace and once more subject their country to the horrors of occupation. The difference between the position of the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress is that the Labour Party under the influence of the patient and far-seeing policy of its leader MacDonald thinks it more correct to wait until the action of the Dawes Plan proves the correctness of the assertion of the Socialist International that the Reparations problem is closely bound up with the general problem of the international regulation of debts.

The British Right Wingers, like ourselves, are within certain limits in favour of the united front tactics. But the Communists above all have in view a united front with the masses, reckoning that this will lead to the liberation of the masses from the influence of the Right Wing Leaders. The latter have in view a united front with the Left Wing leaders, calculating that this will help them to utilise the Left Wing leaders against the masses.

It must be acknowledged, however, that in one respect Tracey is right, MacDonald was really more far-seeing than the Left elements of the trade unions who made radical decisions at Scarborough. MacDonald as a real agent of the bourgeoisie thought out his ideas thoroughly, whereas the majority of the representatives of the Left Wing did not have a clear conception as to what decisions they had taken bound them to in practice. It was just this which enabled the Right Wing to make use of the Left Wingers as a bridge between themselves and the working masses.

The Right Wingers maintained the same tactics of a

united front with the Left leaders at the time of the declaration of the General Strike. Despite the fact that both MacDonald and Thomas considered the strike a crime and a misfortune for the country, they agreed to participate in the leadership of the strike with the correct calculation that at the right moment, when the country was "faced with the danger of civil war," they would be able to get the majority of Left Wingers on to their side and betray the cause of the proletariat.

We see that the characteristic feature of the May General Strike, distinguishing it from the general strike of the Chartist epoch, consisted in the profound contradictions between the growing spontaneous revolutionary mood of the British working masses and the old ideology of trade unionism and of Liberal-Labour politics which still continues to prevail in the leading circles of the British Labour movement, despite the fact that a "Left Wing" had been formed within it. Only the ideology of the Communist Party harmonised, during the time of the strike, with the moods of the masses, but the Party had not yet become a mass Party, it had not yet struck sufficiently deep organisational roots amongst the masses, despite the inspiring "Minority Movement" supporting the Party. Therefore it could not play the role of a decisive factor. The Government understood this historic situation excellently, and adopted its tactics accordingly.

There is no need to prove here that the Government stood and stands entirely on the side of the mineowners, but like them it seeks an outcome from the coal crisis and from the economic crisis in general at the expense of the working class alone; did not Baldwin frankly state, some time ago, that the way out of the situation consisted in lowering the wages not only in mining but in every industry? There is also no need to prove here that the Government provoked the fight with the miners in order to fight the proletariat as a whole, and break its strength and the strength of the trade union organisation; it was not without reason that Baldwin washed his hands of the matter when the mineowners

put forward all their demands at once (going much further than the Parliamentary Commission composed only of bankers' agents) and declared a lock-out. In the present case we are interested in another question—what tactics did the Government pursue to gain its ends?

The Government understood very well that two contradictory factors were participating in the movement. On the one hand the masses, straining for a fight; on the other hand the leaders, the great majority of whom were saturated with democratic and constitutional illusions. The Government knew that with the fighting mood of the working masses the declaration of a general strike would create a direct revolutionary danger. Foreseeing this, long before the strike, the Government drew up a plan for military activities, formed a strike-breakers' organisation (O.M.S.), projected the appointment of civil commissions, etc. It began recruiting volunteers the moment the General Strike started, mobilised the army and fleet, sent military units to the most dangerous points, and declared a state of emergency in the country, etc. But while preparing for open civil war, the Government, however, did not place its main hopes on civil war. If this had been the case, if it had calculated on smashing the movement by military force, it would have arrested the General Council on the very first day of the declaration of the General Strike, would have provoked a collision with the troops, would have set light to passions and sent its military forces into action. We do not know whether it would have scored a victory in this case. We do not know what dimensions the movement would have assumed in the face of such provocative policy, we do not know whether the army would have persisted in its loyalty to the Government when the whole proletariat had risen. All these are factors which cannot be calculated in advance, and which can only be determined in the process of the struggle. But one thing is beyond doubt; in the best case for the Government, if it had drowned the proletarian movement in blood, by shooting workers, it would have at the same time killed the democratic and constitutional illusions which still exist among the British proletariat.

The whole of the political capital that the British bour-

geoisie has accumulated during three quarters of a century, by means of a systematic corruption of the upper strata of the working class, would have been squandered at one throw. All the democratic fig-leaves which hide the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the British monarchy would have fallen at once. The British Government would have faced the proletariat in a worse and more marked form than in the Chartist epoch. It would have appeared before them like the Tsarist autocracy after the shooting of January 19, 1905. It is not surprising that the Government did not want to throw down its last military trump without extreme necessity, but mainly backed the ideology of the majority of Labour leaders, their constitutional illusions, their servility to bourgeois legality, their disgust and terror at revolutionary methods of struggle.

These Government tactics were characterised by certain minor episodes. While bringing over to its side all kinds of volunteers for police and blackleg purposes, the Government also appealed to the organisation of "British Fascists." In order that this aid should not run counter to the Government tactics the organisation on the proposal of the Government had to change its name from "British Fascists" into the organisation of "British Loyalists." Another minor fact is that the Home Secretary, Joynson Hicks, made frequent provocative speeches, brandishing arms before the strike. From the moment of the declaration of the General Strike the Government clearly muzzled him, making him keep his speeches within the framework of constitutionalism. A third small fact is the attitude of the Government to the money sent to the strikers from abroad. The Government of course, desires the defeat of the miners with all its heart and soul, and helps to bring about this defeat behind the scenes. It naturally under all conditions looks with hatred upon all those who support the British strikers from abroad. Nevertheless, in this case, in order to keep up the appearance of constitutionalism, the Government only confiscated money coming to England that was destined to aid the General Strike (a "non-constitutional" act) but decided to let in money sent to the strikers from abroad when the miners only remained on the battlefield engaged in an ordinary union conflict with their employers.

The immediate task which the Government undertook



was to smash the movement in the name of the "Constitution," "Liberty," "Democracy," "Parliamentarism," and the other infinite values compelling the General Council to recognise the Governmental interpretation of the constitution. For this the Government on the one hand terrorised the General Council and on the other, disintegrated it by negotiations with the Right Wing leaders behind the scenes.

The very moment the printers refused to set up the "Daily Mail" article "For King and Country," the Government broke off all official negotiations with the strikers, declaring that "this act is a challenge directed against the constitutional rights and liberties of the nation." This did not of course prevent the Government requisitioning the paper of the General Council, thus actually preventing it from utilising the freedom of the press. The Government broke off diplomatic relations with the General Staff of the strikers until the General Strike was liquidated, giving as its motive—in the words of Baldwin—that the General Strike was an "organised attempt to take us by starvation and to destroy the State" and "that the danger was threatening not wages but the liberty of our constitutional order; Parliament and Parliamentary Government are in danger." It further gave as its motive that "the Government suddenly found itself faced with the fact of a declaration of war on the part of another government." Baldwin's arguments received judicial sanction in the decision of the High Court Judge Astbury, who declared the General Strike illegal as, he said "between the General Council and the Government, *i.e.*, the State, there cannot be a trade dispute."

Intimidating the General Council by saying that it had actually entered the path of revolution, that it had already broken the constitution, and refusing on this basis to negotiate with its representatives, the Government nevertheless continued to maintain contact with the General Council through unofficial channels. Herbert Samuel appeared on the scene and conducted negotiations behind the scenes with Messrs. MacDonald, Thomas and others.

The manœuvre of the Government, its reliance on the constitutional fetishisms of the leaders of the movement, was successful. The first thing the Government obtained was the statement of the General Council that it did not want to throw down a challenge to the constitution, that it did not want to undermine the authority of Parliamentary institutions, that it was only waging an economic struggle, and that there was no constitutional crisis whatsoever. This was deceiving the proletariat, as the General Strike left off being High Court (no longer the owners) threw down a challenge to the proletariat, declaring the strike anti-constitutional.

Secondly, the T.U.C. found it was their duty to act in a Christian manner, not opposing evil by violence, not allowing this movement to emerge from the framework of the strike, to remain with arms folded, not criticising and not directly attacking the Government (not "undermining the authority of Parliamentary institutions"), no matter what extraordinary measures the Government might take for suppressing the movement.

The next act of capitulation out of "loyalty" was the refusal to accept money subscriptions from abroad from the international proletariat. This meant: we are not revolutionaries; we believe that OUR Parliament and OUR Parliamentary Government will settle our internal conflicts justly; we do not need the interference of foreigners in our internal affairs. It also meant rejection of the principle of proletarian solidarity in the name of which the General Strike had been declared.

From these two steps there logically followed the third—complete and unconditional capitulation. When besides the threats from the Government there was added the fear that the increasing collisions of workers with blacklegs and police might bring the temper of the masses to boiling point, when the danger arose that the working masses would of their own will enter on a revolutionary path, and that the General Council would not have the strength to retain them

within the confines of legality, the General Council with great haste declared the strike ended, not demanding any guarantees whatsoever for the strikers from the Government.

When the General Council decided to declare the General Strike, it had carried this proposal through the whole network of trade union organisations right down to the lowest, and only called out the workers for the General Strike when it had received authority from the entire mass of the workers. When the General Council decided to capitulate, to call off the strike, it did not enquire as to the desires of the working masses, but acted independently, behind the backs of the workers. It entered the struggle with a heavy heart and laid down arms with a sigh of relief. The great proletarian army of strikers did not hesitate for a moment, was ready for the fight and straining to enter it. And suddenly it learnt unexpectedly that its leaders had delivered it up to the mercy of the Government.

In order to reinforce the triumph of bourgeois legality over the vital interests of the proletariat, the Government, after the capitulation of the General Council, decided to drive nails into the coffin of the General Strike by acting as formerly under the mask of neutrality, *i.e.*, by acting behind the scenes when it concerned groups of owners, and by acting openly when the matter concerned the defence of the constitution, that is to say, the interests of the bourgeois class as a whole. No sooner was the stoppage of the General Strike announced than the railway companies and other employers' organisations announced reductions of wages to the respective trade unions. When the unions protested and declared that they would continue the strike, the employers conceded this point to them, demanding that the trade unions in gratitude for this kindness sign a number of humiliating conditions. The trade unions following the example of the General Council and agreed to unprecedented humiliation.

Judging from the fact that all employers' organisations

acted absolutely the same way, one may say with certainty that the whole of this manoeuvre was inspired by the Government. By this manoeuvre the Government got the trade unions to scourge themselves and kiss the lash: "We acknowledge that the General Strike was a mistake and in the future we will never tolerate any sympathetic strikes."

Thanks to the law-abiding nature of the trade union leaders the newly hired scabs were nearly everywhere left at work and a corresponding number of honest workers thrown on to the streets. Thanks to this attitude, the trade unions tied up their hands for the future in unprecedentedly humiliating circumstances and the army of a million miners was left to carry on the struggle alone. And they called this the triumph of legality.

The General Strike was defeated, thanks to the profound internal contradiction between the revolutionary mood of the masses and the reactionary ideology of the leaders. Thanks to this contradiction the Government was able to avoid a struggle with the proletariat on revolutionary grounds, and to beat its leaders on constitutional grounds. It is clear that such a general strike in Great Britain cannot be repeated. The Government has relied on the constitution and on illusions, in the face of a General Strike, for the last time in Great Britain.

What is going to happen afterwards? After the defeat of the Chartists profound darkness descended on the British Labour Movement for many years. One need not be an optimist to say that the defeat of the May General Strike cannot have such consequences. The decline of the British movement in the second half of the 19th century was not caused by the defeat of the General Strike in 1842, but by the stormy growth of capitalism which took place in Great Britain after the repeal of the Corn Laws. The fighting spirit of the British proletariat evaporated because the ten

hour day was introduced and wages began to rise. The present situation is profoundly different from the situation of those days. However the stubborn and persistent strike of the miners may end, whatever measures for reorganising the mining industry the Government may take, these will be palliative measures not destroying the privileges of the landlords owning land in which the mines are situated, and not encroaching on the property of the owners of the smaller and technically more backward mines. This means that the British mining crisis will not be ended. Nor will the general economic crisis in Great Britain be overcome. As distinct from the middle of the last century, the bourgeoisie now intends holding the proletariat in check, not by cutting down the working day and increasing wages, but on the contrary by lowering wages and lengthening working hours by transferring all the weight of the economic crisis on to the shoulders of the working class. Needless to say such methods cannot pacify the masses.

This by no means signifies that the defeat of the May General Strike will leave no traces. It will lead directly not only to an economic offensive of capital, but also to increased political reaction in Great Britain. This, in connection with the fact that the old leaders have become bankrupt, and the trade unions have formally bound themselves hand and foot by humiliating conditions, will undoubtedly at first render a continuation of a working class offensive **on a broad United Front** impossible.

Before continuing the struggle the British proletariat will have to regroup its forces, reform its ranks and reorganise its unions and political organisations, and this will be linked up with a severe internal struggle within the working class between revolutionary and reformist ideology. Up to the present time so-called wide-scale democracy has prevailed in the British Labour movement, making possible close collaboration between the most extreme reformists, direct agents of the bourgeoisie, and Left elements spouting revolutionary phrases. The general laws of strategy demand that during a war leadership be centralised and in firm hands.



Thanks to the rotten traditions of the British Labour movement, just at the moment when the General Council declared the General Strike, MacDonald and Henderson were invited to partake in the leadership—people who have frequently stated that in principle they were enemies of general strikes and against any class struggle in general, people who obviously continued in the movement in order to betray. This cannot be repeated again.

The tense struggle between revolution and reformism which has seethed and is seething in the Labour movement on the European Continent, and which is inevitable in order to mature the proletariat for the struggle for power, is now transferred to Great Britain. One section of the workers under the influence of the defeat of the General Strike will finally sell out to the bourgeoisie, will refuse any display of proletarian solidarity, will be law-abiding to the very end, while the other larger and better section will gradually assimilate the lessons of the General Strike, will understand that the great economic struggles between labour and capital can only end victoriously when one section of the proletariat is supported by all the other sections, and that when things go as far as a General Strike this can only be victorious if the proletariat sweeps away all constitutional democratic illusions, and enters upon an open political struggle against the existing authorities

The coming period in Great Britain will be one of regrouping, and the crystallising centre for the revolutionary elements of the working class will be the Communist Party, for this Party alone did not compromise itself in the recent great conflict, it alone displayed itself among the working masses as a true and reliable defender of their interests.

Mr. MacDonald calls the Communists "demagogues." The British proletariat has had the opportunity to see whether this is true or not. When the British workers entered the struggle, the Communist Party of Great Britain gave them no unrealisable promises, nor did it nourish any

illusions to them, but soberly estimated the situation, basing its arguments on the fact that the outcome of the struggle not only depended upon the preparedness of the proletariat for the fight, but also upon the leadership, and that the present leadership is anything but reliable. On the eve of the declaration of the General Strike Comrade Murphy wrote in the "Workers' Weekly" that the present crisis did not mean a final revolutionary crisis, as the ruling class painted it :

" If the trade unions were staffed and led by a mass Communist Party, welding the whole workers' movement to working class principles behind the revolutionary leadership of the Communist Party, the character of the present crisis would be different, and the nervous heroics 'of Jix would be more justified'"

But things are still far from this. We have not yet got a mass Communist Party, we are not yet leaders of the trade unions. We have not yet beaten MacDonald and Co.

The Communist Party took into consideration the dangers arising for the movement because of its unreliable leadership. But this did not hinder it from fulfilling its duty, standing in the front ranks of the movement, urging forward, issuing more and more decisive slogans as the movement developed, vigilantly watching the conduct of the leaders, warning them against vacillation and denouncing them before the workers every time they wavered.

The Communist Party before the strike put the finishing

touches to the demands of the miners, putting forward besides defensive slogans, also the demand for nationalisation of the mines without compensation and with workers' control; and the miners accepted these slogans. The Communist Party brought forward the question of a General Strike (although in a cautious form as it was conscious of its inadequate influence in Great Britain) and called upon the General Council to call a conference of all the executive committees of unions, in order IF NECESSARY to reply to the attempt to lower miners' wages by a General Strike. The Communist Party called upon the trade unions to organise Councils of Action and Workers' Defence Corps, and took an active part in the Councils of Action. The Communist Party and the representatives of the organised Minority called upon the General Council to summon an International Conference of Action for a "blockade" of British capitalism. The only Communist M.P., and other members of the British Party, called upon the soldiers not to fire on the workers.

The British Communist Party on May 2nd gave warning about the danger of the Government, jointly with the Right Wing of the movement, endeavouring to isolate the miners from the movement as a whole. The Communist Party on May 5th stated in its manifesto that it was time to radicalise the slogans of the movement, that there must be a demand for the resignation of the Government, which was supporting the mineowners and issuing false accusations against the workers, that the formation of a Labour Government should be demanded, that the restriction of the strike to purely defensive measures was full of dangers, that in order to secure victory it was necessary to begin attacking and turn the strike into a ruthless struggle against the capitalists. After the capitulation of the General Council the Communist Party of Great Britain denounced in most energetic terms, the treachery of the General Council and the shameful conduct not only of the Right Wing, but also of the Left Wing, the

majority of whom conducted themselves not much better than the Right Wing in the moment of crisis.

The conduct of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the conflict is bound to attract the sympathy of the wide masses of the workers, and its numbers are already growing rapidly. Now is the time when the British Communist Party can become and will become a mass Party, as a result of explaining to the working masses the lessons of the General Strike, supporting in the most energetic manner the prolonged miners' strike and rousing the sentiment of proletarian solidarity among the other sections of workers.

In bygone times a mass political party in the British Labour movement did not exist and could not exist because of the dualism of this movement. According to the ideas prevalent among the British workers politics meant Parliamentary compromise. For such politics a Party had no need of mass support; it was enough to send a few good bargainers to Parliament. On the other hand the proletariat considered the mass movement a purely economic struggle, led by the trade unions and not promoting any wide political demands whatsoever. An end has now been put to this dualism; the compromising mediating policy of the leaders of the Labour Party has only led to the defeat of the proletariat. The economic struggle of the miners (as already planned on the eve of the war when the idea of a Triple Alliance between the miners, railwaymen and transport workers was formulated) under existing conditions logically led to the action of the working class as a whole which, as the General Strike shows, can only be successful as a **conscious** political struggle against the entire bourgeois class.

There is a resurrection at a higher level of the conditions which existed at the dawn of the movement in the epoch of Chartism, when the mass political party of the Chartists was built up in two or three years and when there was no break

between ideology and the mass impetus. What the Chartists commenced so gloriously will find its glorious realisation through the Communists. Such are the dialectics of the British Labour Movement.

A. MARTYNOV.





# 'Jim' Connolly and the Irish Rising of 1916

## The Significance of Ireland for the Comintern.

**I**N this age so prolific in anniversaries, one event should not be forgotten—at the end of April and the beginning of May we celebrated the Tenth Anniversary of the Irish Rising in 1916, and the shooting of its leader, James Connolly.

During the past few years Ireland has been relatively quiet, both as regards general and internal British policy. But it would be a serious mistake to regard as permanent the present stagnation in the political life of the workers and toiling peasantry of Ireland. Already there are signs of revival. The Irish question has not been solved by the creation of the Irish "Free State" with Dominion rights, nor has the misery of the oppressed Irish workers and small peasantry been in any way alleviated thereby. Directly under the noses of the lords of the greatest Imperialist State in Europe exists the greatest anti-imperialist force, the significance of which will continue to develop the greater the decline of British capitalism. The mutual support of the British and Irish working masses in their struggle against the common enemy is of the greatest importance, and not least for the British worker.

It is noteworthy that Ireland, in spite of its revolutionary significance and possibilities, has hitherto played but an insignificant rôle in the Communist International. The main reason for this lies in the decline of the revolutionary Labour movement in Ireland itself; this of late years has reached a regrettable level, the causes of which call for investigation. Ireland with its complicated conditions presents special difficulties to the Communist movement. It is there-

fore most important for us to study these special conditions and the experience of the revolutionary struggle in Ireland. The 1916 rising made by troops mainly composed of workers, agricultural labourers and labouring peasants, and the work of that great Irish Marxist who led this insurrection, played a most important rôle in this struggle. Here we have the opportunity of studying the strong and weak sides of the young Irish Labour movement, since Connolly himself in his qualities and faults was a typical representative of the best section of the working class of his country .

The British oppressor has always been a past master in the art of keeping not only Europe but also his own country in the dark about conditions and events in Ireland, thereby isolating the Irish fighters for freedom. This isolation was not without effects upon the workers also, and thus it happened that the works of a James Connolly must to-day be dug out, so to speak, while the workers are almost ignorant of the fact that in Ireland a revolutionary Marxist of the first water worked and struggled. A Marxist far beyond his contemporaries in the Labour movement of the Anglo-Saxon countries, he understood despite his early end, and put into practice, the basic theories of Leninism. The title of honour must be given him : in the following pages we will show how he applied this point of view to the basic questions of the Irish working class.

### The Role of the Working Class in the Irish Struggle for Freedom.

A biographer of Connolly\* who examined the origin of his popularity amongst the Irish workers refers to the problem of "Connolly's secret." As a solution he finds only a few general phrases about understanding how to subject the lesser to the greater, etc. "Connolly's secret," however, is quite clear. It is THE COMBINATION OF THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE AND OF THE REVOLUTIONARY CLASS STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS. IT IS THE PROOF OF THE NECESSITY OF LEADERSHIP IN THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION IN IRELAND.

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\* D. Ryan. "James Connolly." London, 1924.

Connolly ardently sympathised with the hatred of the masses against the imperialist oppression of Great Britain, and with their longing for national liberty. In the narrow sense of the word he was no nationalist; on the contrary, he was active both in theory and practice as a Marxist Internationalist. He was a stranger to any feeling against England as such. He spent the greater part of his youth in England, where he was active as an agitator in the Social Democratic Federation and frequently worked in the closest harmony with the British Labour movement against capitalists both in England and Ireland. He loved to use the declaration of the "United Irelanders" from the time of the first French Revolution :

"As to any union between the two islands, believe us when we assert that OUR UNION RESTS UPON OUR MUTUAL INDEPENDENCE. WE SHALL LOVE EACH OTHER IF WE BE LEFT TO OURSELVES . . . . "

Connolly took a deep interest in the history of the Irish struggle for liberation, those 700 years of tragic history of wars, unsuccessful risings, treason, terror and famine. He raised the question as to the causes of the failure of the former movements, especially those during the past hundred and fifty years. As answer he found that the national struggle had not been linked up with the social struggle. He declares in his most important work, "Labour in Irish History"\* :

" . . . . As we have again and again pointed out, the Irish question is a social question, the whole age-long fight of the Irish people against their oppressors resolves itself in the last analysis into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production, in Ireland. Who would own and control the land? The people or the invaders; and if the invaders, which set of

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\* "Labour in Irish History." This classical Marxist treatment of the Irish question is quite unknown on the Continent. It is really most important that this book should be published both in the Russian and in the German languages.

them—the most recent swarm of land thieves, or the sons of the thieves of a former generation? These were the bottom questions of Irish politics, and all other questions were valued or deprecated in the proportion to which they contributed to serve the interests of some of the factions who had already taken their stand in this fight around property interests.”

The result of this was that very many struggles for freedom failed because they did not carry with them the working masses, for

“the producing classes could not be expected to rally to the revolution unless given to understand that it meant their freedom from social as well as from political bondage.”

This, however, does not give quite a clear interpretation of the failure of the national struggle. A further reason was to be found in the leadership of this struggle. The rich bourgeoisie, bound by a thousand ties to the ruling class in England and terrified of the class struggle, betrayed the struggle for national liberty; the middle and petty bourgeoisie wavered helplessly and sought a peaceful compromise in the most constitutional manner possible, always in fear that their agitation might cause the working masses to raise the social question

“The spokesmen of the middle class, in the press and on the platform, have consistently sought the emasculation of the Irish National Movement, the distortion of Irish history, and, above all, the denial of all relation between the social rights of the Irish toilers and the political rights of the Irish nation. It was hoped and intended by this means to create what is termed ‘a real National movement,’ *i.e.*, a movement in which each

class would recognise the rights of the other classes and laying aside their contentions would unite in a national struggle against the common enemy—England. Needless to say, the only class deceived by such phrases was the working class.

When questions of 'class' interests are eliminated from public controversy a victory is thereby gained for the possessing, conservative class, whose only hope of security lies in such elimination. During the last hundred years every generation in Ireland has witnessed an attempted rebellion against English rule. Every such conspiracy or rebellion has drawn the majority of its adherents from the lower orders in town and country, yet under the inspiration of a few middle class doctrinaires the social question has been rigorously excluded from the field of action to be covered by the rebellion if successful; in hopes that by such exclusion it would be possible to conciliate the upper classes and enlist them in the struggle for freedom. The result has in nearly every case been the same. The workers, though furnishing the greatest proportion of recruits to the ranks of the revolutionists, and consequently of victims to the prison and the scaffold, could not be imbued *en masse* with the revolutionary fire necessary to seriously imperil a domination rooted for 700 years in the heart of their country. They were all anxious enough for freedom, but realising the enormous odds against them, and being explicitly told by their leaders that they **MUST NOT EXPECT ANY CHANGE IN THEIR CONDITION OF SOCIAL SUBJECTION, EVEN IF SUCCESSFUL**, they as a body shrank from the contest, and left only the purest minded and most chivalrous of their class to face the odds and glut the vengeance of the tyrant."

Hence, declared Connolly, the liberation struggle in Ireland was only possible under the leadership of the working class, which should now take over the lead in this struggle.



"The result of the long drawn out struggle of Ireland has been, so far, that the old chieftainry has disappeared, or through its degenerate descendants has made terms with iniquity, and become part and parcel of the supporters of the established order; the middle class, growing up in the midst of the national struggle, and at one time, as in 1798, through the stress of the economic rivalry of England almost forced into the position of revolutionary leaders against the political despotism of their industrial competitors, have now also bowed the knee to Baal, and have a thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism, as against every sentimental or historic attachment drawing them towards Irish patriotism, only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland."

The National movement was at a low ebb when Connolly began his activities in Ireland in the '90's. The development of British capitalism had not been without its effects on Ireland, and crumbs from the table of imperialist England had fallen to the upper and middle classes in Ireland. The land reforms had had a temporary pacifying effect on the peasantry, hence the National movement had adopted a rather tame form. Its programmes was simply Home Rule, limited autonomy within the framework of Great Britain, and the road thereto was by constitutional methods.

Connolly started a bitter struggle against the Home Rulers. His programme was clear and definite: complete separation from Great Britain, an independent Irish Republic. The road thereto was by means of mass organisation and of mass struggle, using every possible legal method and in the final issue revolutionary insurrection.

In 1898 Connolly founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party and its organ, "The Workers' Republic." The I.S.R.P. declares its programme to be the development of an Irish Socialist Republic based on public ownership by the Irish people of the land and the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Connolly himself writes about the effect of the new Party upon the political life on Ireland :

“ It is no exaggeration to say that this organisation and its policy completely revolutionised advanced politics in Ireland. When it was first initiated the word ‘ Republic ’ was looked upon as a word to be only whispered among intimates ; the Socialists boldly advised the driving from political life of all who would not openly accept it. The thought of revolution was the exclusive possession of a few remnants of the secret societies of a past generation, and was never mentioned by them except with heads close together and eyes fearfully glancing round. The Socialists broke through this ridiculous secrecy, and in hundreds of speeches in the most public places of the metropolis, as well as in scores of thousands of pieces of literature scattered through the country, announced their purpose to muster all the forces of Labour for a revolutionary reconstruction of society.”

Just as Connolly founded the first Socialist Labour Party in Ireland, so too he worked with the greatest enthusiasm in organising the trade unions. Together with Jim Larkin he roused with his fiery agitation and apt leadership the working masses in Ireland, and worked for the foundation of trade union organisations. When Jim Larkin founded the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union he received the full support of Connolly, who together with Larkin became the most important organiser in the movement. And what is still more, it can be justly said that Connolly was the theoretician of the movement. He applied in a brilliant manner the good that he had learned in America from the Industrialists. Still, although he fought for the correct revolutionary aspect of industrialism in contrast to the out-of-date reformist ideas of craft unionism, he struggled against every tendency towards separation from the “ political movement.” On the contrary, the Transport Workers' Movement formed the basis for the creation of the Irish Labour Party, and was at the same time the most active factor in the national revolutionary movement for liberation.

The general strike of the Dublin workers in 1913

marked the brilliant climax of the trade union mass movement which was thus created.

### The Union with the Peasantry.

Just as Connolly was convinced of the necessity of the leadership of the working class, so too he realised that its fate was inseparably involved with that of the peasantry, with whom union must be established if national and social liberation were to be attained. He stood for the Leninist interpretation of this alliance both in theory and in practice. Since the Irish question, at least until the beginning of this century, fundamentally revolved around the question "Who possesses the land and governs?" he took as starting point the understanding of the Irish struggle for freedom.

During the 700 years of British rule the Irish peasantry, which had hitherto owned and tilled the land on the basis of a kind of clan kinship, had been robbed of their land with the most fearful cruelty. The land was given to the British conquerors and their supporters and servants. The peasants were driven away and physically destroyed by wars, hunger and terror, or remained as tenant farmers. In this way, the peasants came to live as tenants on that same ground which in reality belonged to them, and at the same time were obliged to pay the landlords scandalously high rents. The result was misery amongst the peasants, which was hard to distinguish from chronic famine. Ireland produced and exported large quantities of corn, but the peasants mainly existed on potatoes.

Every bad potato harvest made a big change for the worse in the condition of the peasantry. In 1845-1849, there was a terrible famine, which brought in its wake the deaths of several hundred thousands from hunger and fever. And during this time Ireland continued to export corn for large sums of money. Even to-day, after the agrarian reform, such periods of famine are still possible, as was proved by the famine in Ireland in the winter of 1924-25, which was particularly rampant among the peasants in the West.

The results of this condition of the peasantry were voiced in many peasant risings and revolts, in which the peasantry supplied the mass of the troops until the time of the development of the industrial proletariat. In the famine years, in 1848, and in the '70's under the leadership of the "Land

League " these peasant risings were particularly widespread.

The year 1848 was also marked as a year of disgraceful weakness and treachery on the part of the petty bourgeoisie and the betrayal of a powerful and specially hopeful revolutionary mass movement. Connolly writes bitterly and with contempt of the leaders of the " Young Ireland " movement, who from fear of the social land demands of the peasantry lost a favourable possibility for revolution and separation from England. Our Irish Girondists sacrificed the Irish peasantry on the altar of private property. With scorn he writes (" Labour in Irish History ") about these " revolutionaries " who wanted to carry out the rising in a " respectable " manner :

" English army on one side, provided with guns, bands and banners; Irish army on the other side, also provided with guns, bands and banners, ' serried ranks with glittering steel,' no mere proletarian insurrection, and no interference with the rights of property . . . . But the crowning absurdity of all was the leadership of William Smith O'Brien. He wandered through the country telling the starving peasantry to get ready, but refusing to allow them to feed themselves at the expense of the landlords who had so long plundered, starved, and evicted them; he would not allow his followers to seize upon the carts of grain passing along the roads where the people were dying for want of food; at Mullinahone he refused to allow his followers to fell trees to build a barricade across the road until they had asked permission of the landlords who owned the trees."

As a counterpart to this Connolly writes full of appreciation of the Fenians who in their struggle for national freedom and social liberty of the workers joined with the Land League, *i.e.*, the peasants in the struggle for the land :

" When the revolutionary nationalists threw in their lot with the Irish Land League, and made the land struggle the basis for their warfare, they were not only placing themselves in touch once more with those inex-

haustable quarries of material interests from which all the great Irish statesmen from Laurence O'Toole to Wolfe Tone drew the stones upon which they build their edifice of a militant patriotic Irish organisation, but they were also, consciously or unconsciously, placing themselves in accord with the principles which underlie and inspire the modern movement of Labour."

This union of the workers and peasants Connolly declared to be the basis and inspiration of the modern Labour movement, and in full recognition he points out that the principles of the Land League were not only recognised as Communist, but that the organ of the Land League in America, "The Irish World," bore the sub-title of "American Industrial Liberator."

The agrarian reform was introduced. The causes therefore were the pressure brought to bear by the Land League movement and the circumstance that the investment of capital in industrial undertakings, because of the competition of American corn, had become more profitable than agriculture in Ireland. For this reason, the British Parliament, at the close of the last century and the beginning of the present, decided upon a series of laws enabling the peasants to purchase their land from the landlords. The peasants were able to secure the land on credit advanced by the State at 49 years' purchase at the rate of four per cent. (later three and a quarter per cent.). The landlords received in addition to the market price of their land an additional sum from the State varying between three and eight per cent. The result of these reforms, or rather this buying out of the landlords, was the transformation of Ireland gradually from a country of tenants to that of a country of small peasants who owned their own farms. In 1914 there were 348,855 peasants who owned their own land and 217,282 tenant farmers. This latter figure has been reduced still more since that time, and to-day only about one-third of the land is held on lease.

In spite of these reforms the overwhelming majority of peasants even to-day do not employ hired labour. That is to say, the overpowering mass of the Irish country folk is composed of labouring peasants (petty peasants and tenant farmers). This peasantry is oppressed by the heavy weight



of debt. It is obliged to pay twice as much for its own land as it is worth, as a result of all this interest, extras and land speculation.

“ Thus the Irish people found themselves robbed in very deed for a second time. First the Britishers took their land away from them by force, and then by means of Acts of Parliament forced them to pay more than double the price for this same land.”\*

In addition to this, there was a further nuisance, the “ Combeen men,” traders and bank capitalists, who in the small rural places acted as veritable leeches on the rural population and were hand in glove with the former landlords.

“ Indeed the buying out of the landlords in many cases served only to gorge still further the ever-rapacious maw of those parasites upon rural life.”†

Connolly cherished no illusions about the land “reform.” He showed up the fact that the mass of the peasantry was still steeped in misery and that the necessity for joint struggle with the workers still existed, was even still greater than hitherto. The opponent and exploiter had only changed his shape. Formerly that shape was that of a feudal capitalist landlord and now the peasantry was faced with trade and bank capital and the tax collector of the British Government.

Connolly wrote on the effects of the reforms on the land question :

“ But that question so dreaded rises again ; it will not lie down, and cannot be suppressed. The partial success of the Land League has effected a change in Ireland, the portent of which but few realise. Stated

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\* Kernheizev (“ Revolutionary Ireland ”), Moscow, 1923.

† J. Connolly, “ The Reconquest of Ireland,” Dublin, 1914.

briefly, it means that the recent Land Acts, acting contemporaneously with the development of trans-Atlantic traffic, are converting Ireland into a country governed according to the conception of feudalism into a country shaping itself after capitalist laws of trade. That war which the Land League fought, and then abandoned, before it was either lost or won, will be taken up by the Irish toilers on a broader field with sharper weapons, and a more comprehensive knowledge of all the essentials of permanent victory. As the Irish septs of the past were accounted Irish or English according as they rejected or accepted the native or foreign social order, as they measured their oppression or freedom by their loss or recovery of the collective ownership of their lands, so the Irish toilers from henceforward will base their fight for freedom not upon the winning or losing the right to talk in an Irish Parliament, but upon their progress towards the mastery of those factories, workshops, and farms upon which a people's bread and liberties depend."

The correctness of this analysis was proved by the rôle which the peasants played in the civil war, 1919-1921, during which agrarian unrest and arbitrary expropriation by the peasants took place.

According to Connolly, Co-operation was one of the most important forms of joint work between peasants and workers. Larkin couched his and Connolly's programme thus: To organise the workers into unions according to industry, to join them together into one political unit and at the same time to unite the agricultural workers with the urban workers through Co-operation.

As we will see from the quotation given below, Connolly went still further. To his mind Co-operatives did not only constitute contact between workers and peasants but also provided the possibility of a joint Labour Party (as we would say to-day a Farmer-Labour Party).

His genius penetrated still further. He understood that the Co-operatives provided the only way of transforming agriculture under conditions of private ownership to Socialism and after the overthrow of capitalism the Co-operatives would act as a means by which the conflict between town and country would be overcome, and both would be joined together in a unified Socialist economy. And Connolly emphasises :

" If to that combination of agriculturalists and urban labourers we have just hinted at, as a possibility of co-operation upon the economic field, we add the further possible development of an understanding upon the political field between these two groups of co-operators we begin to realise the great and fundamental change now slowly maturing in our midst . . . . Then when to the easily organised labourers of the towns is added the staying power of the peasantry, and when representatives appear in the Halls of Legislature voicing their combined demands, the Party of Labour which will thus manifest itself will speak with a prophetic voice when it proclaims its ideal of a regenerated Ireland re-conquered for its common people.

For the only true prophets are they who carve out the future which they announce."\*

### Connolly, the Revolutionary and Marxist.

Connolly was proud to declare himself a Marxist. He makes frequent reference to Marx in his book " Labour and Irish History," which in itself represents an attempt to apply Marxist method to Irish history. He speaks of Marx as " the greatest of modern thinkers and the first scientific Socialist."

Connolly was enabled to follow a real Marxist tactic by the fact of his profound understanding of Marxism. He

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\* " Reconquest of Ireland."

pursued a real Marxist policy, between the open reformists on the one hand and the pure military revolutionaries (no rarity in Ireland), the rigid trade unionists and the sectarian pseudo-Marxist Socialists on the other.

Constitutional Fabianism earned his contempt. He was fully aware of the advantage of utilising all legal possibilities and of the necessity of spending years in organising, agitating for the daily struggle on behalf of partial demands. But he would countenance no infringement of the recognition that the final issue of all great political and social questions could only be decided by force, and that Ireland's liberation from the British imperialist yoke and the social emancipation of its workers was only possible through revolutionary channels. He, the organiser of industrial trade unions, fought political sectarianism at the same time. He invited his comrades of the Scottish Social Democratic Federation to drop their sectarian scruples (amongst which was the oath of allegiance to king and constitution) and to enter Parliament as a political party.

Connolly was a revolutionary to the core. McManus once wrote (1919) that Connolly was the only Socialist he had met who judged the social position or political crisis from the standpoint of its revolutionary possibilities. As was worthy of a revolutionary, he occupied himself seriously with the political, tactical, and military questions of a rising in Ireland. He understood very well the Leninist conception that a rising is an "art" which has got to be "studied."

During the war his journal, "The Workers' Republic," gave the place of honour to studies about risings, street fights in Moscow in 1905, Paris in 1830 and in 1848, the rising in the Tyrol in 1905, and guerilla warfare in India, revolutionary struggles in Mexico, and similar happenings. At a meeting of the officers of the revolutionary Irish Volunteer Army, Connolly was asked during his lecture on street fights how it happened that he understood so much about revolutionary and military questions. He smilingly replied "You forget that revolution is my business." (Ryan, "J. Connolly.")

It is very worthy of note that Connolly grasped the con-

ception of the Soviet idea. Daniel De Leon influenced him very much in this, he had worked jointly with him in America. Just as he, so too did Connolly declare that the future government and the future division of the country would be based not on territory but on production and its component parts and branches.

### Against the Imperialist War.

It is a platitude to state that Connolly as a revolutionary fighter against imperialism was also an ardent fighter against the last imperialist war. The breakdown of the Socialist International oppressed him greatly. To this was added the complete treachery of the Irish bourgeois and petty bourgeois Nationalists. The former, the Home Rulers, under Redmond's leadership, went over completely to the camp of the British Imperialists; the latter, weak and vacillating, expected to get all assistance from the Germans. From the very beginning Connolly was quite clear that only by a rising of the workers could the war be put a stop to, and also that such a great revolutionary rising would take place. On August 15th, 1914, he wrote to this effect in the Glasgow "Forward." He expressed to the Scottish comrades the wish to take active part in such a co-ordinated international struggle of the workers.

It is not clear why Connolly's Party which had affiliated to the Second International had had so little contact with the Left Wing of this International. It is quite possible that the isolation of Ireland through England during the war was responsible for this.

There was no doubt in Connolly's mind that the war as far as Ireland was concerned would not end without a decisive revolutionary struggle and rising. He understood only too well that this war intensified the crisis to a great extent, and must one way or another lead to a decision in Ireland. Further, he declared, that there never was a more favourable moment than the present for Ireland to fight for its freedom. "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity." In this sense Connolly preached open revolutionary defeatism.

"But we also believe that in times of war we should



act as in war . . . . We shall continue in season and out of season, to teach that 'the far-flung battle line' of England is weakest at the point nearest its heart, that Ireland is in that position of tactical advantage, that a defeat of England in India, Egypt, the Balkans or Flanders, would not be so dangerous to the British Empire as conflict of armed forces in Ireland, that the time for Ireland's Battle is Now—the place for Ireland's Battle is Here."

This declaration shows the Leninist spirit which permeated Connolly's policy.

Connolly looked forward to the pending revolutionary struggle in Ireland not merely as an Irish affair, but he hoped that it might form the beginning of the international revolution.

"Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture are shrivelled up on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

This brings us to the Easter of 1916, the first upheaval in Ireland.

### The Easter Rising.

Irish bourgeois nationalists and British Socialists sought and seek still in vain for an explanation of Connolly's leadership of the Easter rising. Much as these latter sympathised with Connolly as a labour leader and Socialist they could not understand how he could take part in such an act and thus we see the strangest endeavours to explain, or rather to excuse Connolly's attitude during the Red Easter of 1916. It is no small wonder that the Irish rising was either rejected by the British Labour movement, or in the most favourable instance was received with a lack of general understanding.

Some attributed Connolly's attitude to the influence of

his comrade, Pearce, the Republican, who is said to have believed in a mystic manner that every generation of Ireland must offer up a blood sacrifice. The others explained the rising as a result of Connolly's depression and despair caused by the war and the position of Ireland. His decision was also attributed to the fact of his bitter sorrow at the breakdown of the Socialist International and his mental rejection of the mutual slaughter of the workers of all countries, which impelled him to deal a blow, no matter how few people he could win to his side.

Others explained the rising as a demonstration of the wish to show that Ireland was not loyal and did not relinquish her demands.

Others again simply declared the rising was a "Putsch."

Of course, all these explanations are so much nonsense : meant to excuse Connolly, they accuse their originators by showing that they are at loggerheads with the principles of revolutionary struggle, or that they totally misunderstand them. Besides, they are absolutely contrary to the actual facts.

The events proved the correctness of Connolly's Leninist analysis. The war brought economic want to the country. It increased to an extreme degree oppression and deprivation of political rights. Arrests, confiscation, suppression of papers, were the order of the day. Slowly there ripened amongst the masses a condition of revolutionary discontent. The growing strength of the revolutionaries compelled the British Government to prepare, nervously and anxiously, a large-scale destructive offensive and a regime of general reaction.

These conditions brought about a rapprochement between the revolutionary groups. These were : the Irish Transport Workers' Union and the Irish Socialists, who rallied to Connolly's newspaper, the "Workers' Republic," the Irish Citizen Army, which represented the military organisation of both these workers' organisations and was founded during the general strike in 1913, the Sinn Feiners and the Irish

Republican Volunteers. Both the latter groups represented the radical lead of the petty bourgeois nationalists, but at the same time had a strong following amongst the workers and peasants.

Connolly understood that in the coming revolutionary struggle joint work was necessary between these groups. How he interpreted this is shown in the characteristic manner in one of his declarations :

“The time is now ripe (“Irish Worker,” August 15th, 1914), nay the imperious necessities of the hour call loudly for, demand the formation of a committee of all the elements outside, as well as inside the Volunteers, to consider means to take and hold Ireland, and the food of Ireland, for the people of Ireland. We of the Transport Union, we of the Citizen Army, are ready for any such co-operation. We can bring it the aid of drilled and trained men; we can bring to it the heartiest efforts of men and women who in thousands have shown that they know how to face prison and death; and we can bring to it the services of thinkers and organisers who know that different occasions require different policies—that you cannot legalise revolutionary actions and that audacity alone can command success in a crisis like this.”

This collaboration became a reality and under Connolly's influence the Volunteers moved more and more to the Left. The desire for revolutionary action grew amongst their ranks.

After a period of stormy events April 1916 came. A highly charged atmosphere prevailed; mobilisation of both sides began. The British Government prepared for the disarmament by force of the “Volunteers” and of the “Citizen Army” and the destruction of the entire movement. Connolly and his friends were of the opinion that now the time had come for the revolutionaries to act and to proceed from the defensive to the offensive. The leaders of the Volunteers actually gave the order for general manœuvres on a

large scale at Easter, i.e., in other words, the signal for a rising. At the last moment the petty bourgeois leaders of the Volunteers rescinded the order, mainly because the German help which they had expected had failed to arrive. This typical and despicable act of petty bourgeois cowardice was too late. It was not able to restrain the rising, but simply undermined the onslaught. The people from "Liberty Hall" who constituted the life and soul of the rising had already drawn up the proclamation of the Provisional Government of an Independent Irish Republic. The workers and the revolutionary section of the Volunteers were not prepared to give in without a struggle and refused to carry out the order to disband. The rising was unavoidable.

In accordance with the plan previously drawn up, Connolly undertook the leadership without any hesitation.

He undoubtedly hoped that they would succeed in carrying with them the majority of the Volunteer Army; and that in any case the rising, even if it should fail, would constitute the preliminary to a general large scale revolutionary struggle. Hence, he also calmly and with decision weighed the possibilities of its failure. His first hope was shattered, not because the masses of the Volunteers were not ready, but because the disorganisation which the cowardly petty bourgeois leadership caused at the last decisive moment was too great. Subsequent events confirmed his second expectation to the full

On the morning of April 24, the most important points of the city of Dublin were in the hands of the revolutionaries. Proclamations of the Provisional Government were posted up and the radio stations proclaimed on all sides the foundation of an Independent Irish Republic. The people participated in scenes of the most intense enthusiasm.

Then the struggle began. About one thousand Volunteers and workers' troops maintained their position for more than a week against a powerful British Army. Only by ruthless use of artillery, which completely destroyed the whole centre of the city, and by numerical supremacy did the

British succeed, with great losses, in forcing the revolutionaries to surrender after a week's fighting.

Then an orgy of White Terror ensued. Mass shooting of leaders, mass arrests, executions of non-combatants, devastation. In short, imperialistic British civilisation showed itself in its full development. Connolly did not escape his doom. The British Government, a Government in which sat Arthur Henderson, the present Secretary of the Labour Party, signed the order for his execution, which took place on May the 12th. He had been severely wounded in the struggle and was so weak that he was unable to stand and was shot seated in a chair. He met his end calmly and philosophically. Up to the last minute he remained what he had always been, a proletarian revolutionist.

The slogans of the rising were "Down with the War! Down with British Imperialism! All hail a free Irish Republic!" One may wonder, perhaps, that more definite Socialist slogans did not play a bigger rôle in this struggle, but we must not forget to take into consideration that this rising was not the final struggle of the Irish workers, but merely the preliminary thereto. In this way, this first revolutionary outburst of the masses obtained expression at a moment when pressure was felt most strongly from British imperialism and the War. But still the entire rising had a definite Socialist colour. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic declared, although in vague terms, the right of the Irish people to the means of production of wealth. It is apparent from the fact that the rising primarily appealed to the workers, that the masses of the fighters were workers and agricultural labourers, and a considerable section of the leaders Socialists and trade unionists.

The warm words with which Lenin wrote of this Easter rising will best show our appreciation. In his article, "The Results of the Discussion on Self-Determination" of 1916\* he attacks the "monstrous judgment" of those who termed his "heroic rising" a Putsch.

"Those who can term such a rising a Putsch are either the worst kind of reactionaries or hopelessly doc-

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\* Published in "Against the Stream."



trinaires, incapable of imagining the social revolution as a living phenomenon."

And again :

" To assume the possibility that a social revolution without risings of small nations in the colonies and Europe, without revolutionary outbursts of the petty bourgeoisie, with all their prejudices, without movements of the unconscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against the oppression of landowners and the church and monarchists and national oppression, is equivalent to denying the social revolution."

The Irish rising was, as Lenin shows, a manifestation of the serious crisis of imperialism, a crisis which in 1917-18, led to the collapse of a number of imperialist States and to the Proletarian Revolution.

" The crisis of imperialism was at that time still far removed from the stage of its highest development : the power of the imperialist bourgeoisie had not yet been overcome (the War to a finish can bring that about, at present it has not gone so far) ; proletarian movements are still very weak in imperialist States."

" The misfortune of the Irish lay in the fact that their rising was untimely, since the rising of the European proletariat was NOT YET ripe. Capitalism is not so harmoniously constructed that separate sources of risings can suddenly unite without failure of overthrow. On the contrary, the difference in time, the difference and dis-similarity in the place of the risings act as a guarantee for the greatness and depth of the joint movement ; it is only by untimely, partially and consequently unsuccessful attempts at revolutionary risings that the masses will again experience, learn, assemble their forces, recognise their true leaders, the Socialist

proletarians, and thereby prepare the joint attack ; just as isolated strikes, town and national demonstrations, mutinies in the army, peasant risings, etc., prepared the general attack in 1905."

### Civil War and the "Free State."

Lenin's prophetic word was fulfilled. The Easter rising marked the beginning of a new epoch. The rising and the persecutions accomplished in a few weeks what the propaganda of years had failed to do : the ideas of the extreme revolutionary groups and their methods were supported by the masses.\* The revolutionaries realised that the only way to liberate Ireland was through a revolutionary struggle, and they won over practically the whole mass of the Irish people to this programme.

Then came the years of the widespread partisan war, 1919-1921, which stand without parallel in the history of revolutionary struggles, in which the Irish Republic, created at Easter, 1916, was actually thrust on British imperialism. In the end the British Government had to climb down in order not to lose everything. In 1921 Ireland was made a Free State with Dominion rights like Australia and South Africa, having previously separated from the North (Ulster). But even this partial success was only possible as the result of the armed revolutionary struggle which had been inaugurated by the Easter rising.

The disunited, petty bourgeois nature of the leadership of the struggle was shown by the Republican consent to this compromise. Only the radical wing, consisting mainly of working elements, agricultural labourers, and the poorer petty bourgeoisie, refused to accept the compromise ; these were led by De Valera. Then a fresh civil war ensued and the world witnessed the sad example of the Irish Nationalists and Republicans, in the garb of the Free State, but really as the agents of British imperialism and of the Irish capitalists, slaughtering by hundreds Irish Republicans and fighters for freedom.

To-day the Free State has become a respectable

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\* Kernheimer. "Revolutionary Ireland."

Dominion of the British Empire, Mr. Cosgrave, the President, on the occasion of the last attack on Mussolini's nose, sent a moving and servile telegram of sympathy.

But naturally the Irish question has not been solved thereby, nor have its workers been helped; the rôle of liberator falls to the workers of Ireland.

The Irish Labour movement after the Easter rising committed a number of serious errors. Up to that time it had taken the lead politically in the struggle against British imperialism, and in the struggle against conscription in 1917-1918 by means of the strike weapon. But now it resigned this leadership into the hands of the petty bourgeoisie. At the time of the 1918 elections it decided not to put forward any Labour Party or trade union candidates because of the Sinn Féiners. This was a suicidal manner of establishing the united front against British imperialism. But it served as only one example in a long political history of how the active elements of the working class were completely enmeshed in the petty bourgeois Republican movement, and how the workers and toiling peasantry again were taken in too by the petty bourgeoisie. The Labour movement has not taken to heart Connolly's Leninist slogan, that in spite of the united front with the revolutionary nationalists the workers must retain their independence and their leading rôle.

De Valera's tardy (or premature (?)) rising against the compromise and the Free State, in which many workers and agricultural labourers took part, was also a mistake. It had as a result the further destruction of the active forces of the workers and the revolutionary strata of the petty bourgeoisie.

To-day the position of the revolutionary movement in Ireland is most unsatisfactory. The trade union movement is split and weakened. There is neither a Socialist Labour Party nor a Communist Party. The Labour Party is weak and expends its energy in petty reformist work. In reality, it is simply the parliamentary representative of the trade unions and has no proper organisation. Amongst the remaining Republicans who have been quite scattered, there are many good revolutionary forces. The peasants are unorganised.

Thus we see that the first task of the Irish working class is to consolidate its forces and create a virile leadership and organisation. It is an absolute necessity to found a class-conscious revolutionary Labour Party, and in this connection we must welcome the existing tendencies towards forming an Irish Workers' Party. The trade unions must be strengthened and made into a real powerful trade union movement. The Labour Party must raise the standard of Connolly; it ought never to lose sight of the fact that the workers alone should have the struggle for the final liberation from British imperialism and capitalism. It must not forget that for this end it must act jointly with the peasantry, and this is all the more possible in Ireland since the majority consists of hard-working small farmers.

Thus, in union with the British working class, the other oppressed people in the British Empire and the workers of other countries, the Irish workers will raise aloft in Ireland the red flag of the Irish Workers' Republic.

G. SCHULLER.



# Book Review

## "LABOUR AND HOUSING IN BOMBAY."

By R. Burnett Hirst.

Published by P. King.

**T**HIS book is written by a professor of the Allaha-bad University (India). It provides a most detailed description of the conditions of life of the Bombay workers, the participation of Indian women in production, their wages, and the trade union movement. It is copiously illustrated.

The civil war between the northern and southern American States, and the cotton famine in Lancashire which accompanied it, made Bombay an important centre of the textile industry. The growth of industry and trade in Bombay was accompanied by a large increase in the population. In 1872 there were 644,000 inhabitants in Bombay, while in 1921 the population of this town had already reached 1,176,000.

We might remark in passing that the development of cotton growing in Egypt was also to a large extent due to the abolitionist war. However, at present Egypt cannot be transformed from a country growing and exporting cotton into a country manufacturing cotton stuffs, as **the absence of damp atmosphere** along the valley of the Nile prevents the development of the textile industry. As far as climate is concerned Bombay is extremely favourable for the manufacture of textiles. On the outskirts of Bombay huge plantations have been laid out which directly supply the Bombay textile factories with raw material. Already in 1921 there were 85 mills in Bombay in which on an average 146,000 workers were engaged daily.

The imperialist war gave a powerful impetus to the development of Indian industry. The railway shops and also the engineering works and ship yards worked at high pressure. Bombay became the largest port of India. In 1921-22 41 per cent. of all imports and 38 per cent. of India's exports passed through Bombay port, the docks of which have been adapted for the entry of the largest ocean-going vessels.

The chapters devoted to the position of the Bombay workers are very interesting. The child mortality figures given picture clearly the miserable position of the Bombay proletariat; whereas in Great Britain in 1911-14 there were 172 deaths out of every thousand children born, in Bombay



in 1918 infant mortality reached 572 per thousand and in 1921, 667 per thousand. (Annual Reports of the Executive Health Officer for the City of Bombay.)

These figures, given in the official report, need no comment.

The working day is usually not less than 12 hours, with extremely low wages. The author deals in great detail with the wage rates of various categories of the Bombay proletariat. However much he tries to paint actualities in fine colours (here he shows his imperialist ideology) the figures speak for themselves.

The book undoubtedly deserves the most serious attention of all those interested in Colonial questions.

The Bombay proletariat has learnt to fight for its rights; this is eloquently testified by the three months' strike of the Bombay textile workers. In the ninth chapter devoted to the trade union movement, we find extremely informative tables on the growth of the trade unions in Bombay. By 1922 there were 48 unions there with a membership of 80,000.

Both in the text and in the appendices there are a great many official documents and statistical tables fully illustrating the material position of the Bombay proletariat, the housing and hygienic conditions of these creators of profit for the British and native bourgeoisie.

P. K.



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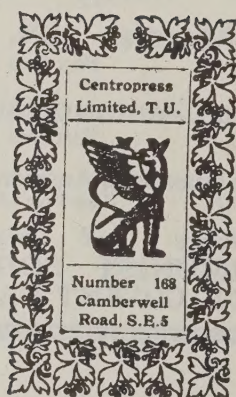
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